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The Institute for the Study of Insurgent Warfare:

INSURGENCIES



A Journal on Insurgent Strategy

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Since the beginning of the end of Occupy anarchists in the United States have again found themselves in an all too familiar position: an impasse. Around the world, class conflicts and zones of insurgent activity are increasing in frequency and number. In the United States, however, the crackdown on Occupy seems to have reinforced the conclusion that resistance and direct action are hopeless pursuits. For those of us who won't—or can't—quit, the most consistent response to this impasse has focused on a common question: What is to be done?

To escape this impasse means going back to a fundamental question of what it means to engage in the insurgent. We can call ourselves fighters, but we cannot understand how to fight until we begin to develop a discourse of what we are fighting, and where, in a material sense. Until we can begin to grasp this question, or build a narrative around this question, we will continue to shift between utopian narratives and glittering generalities of conceptual resistance.

Insurgency is a thing that occurs, it resists conceptualization, refuses valuation and, as such, conceptual questions of meta-politics are irrelevant. *Insurgencies*, a journal edited by The Institute For The Study of Insurgent Warfare, will return to questions of the immediacy and materiality of conflict and insurrection. This project, along with its associated blog (isiw.noblogs.org), will focus on questions of immediacy—outside of political codification—on the level of tactics and material dynamics. *Insurgencies* will aim to develop an analysis of the dynamics of actual material conflicts on the ground and the terrains in which they occur, from the submerged conflicts that occur within everyday life (theft, worker insubordination, illegalism, etc) to the celebrated moments when the logistics of policing are ruptured and possibilities abound.

CONTENTS:

What is Insurgency?.....	7
On Deep Green Failures or The Problem of Inert Strategy.....	21
A Life of Lies.....	57
Some Thoughts on the Limits of Surveillance.....	77

WHAT IS INSURGENCY?

THESIS 1: Up until this point critiques of activism have tended to focus on the characteristics of activists that we find reprehensible.

It is easy to despise leftists. The popularity of their positions inclines them toward slow and flabby thoughts, reassured by the supportive murmurings of their fellows and the ease with which they rebuke the equally inept ideas of their traditional opponents on the right. It is simple to look at their love of the democratic form, of representation and protest, and read into the frequency with which self described activists are also leftists, a conflation of the two. We find these critiques of activism proliferating in the anarchist milieu as of late, revulsion at the cycle of endless meetings, as well as rejection of consensus and the concept of the all-controlling general assembly, the legislative form that permeates this sort of action, gutting the very possibility of volatility. However, as critics we are, as with so much else, inclined to first pluck the low hanging fruit and with activism reach immediately for the theatrical antics of incoherent protesters and the joyful naivety of the charitable who would build a better world one filled belly at a time. It takes little effort to dismiss their politics as nonsense, their motives as exhibitionist, their practices as invasive, or their endeavors as ultimately ineffectual, but the sort of examination which seeks merely to dismiss the activist position

fails to grasp its conceptual underpinnings as the font from which these other things spring. It is not as though activists fail because they have long meetings or enjoy screaming at empty buildings; these are merely symptoms of a more general sickness. Rather, the failure of activism appears at the core of the activistic injunction to act in all moments on the discursive terrain of a mythologized “social conversation,” and to declare ourselves victorious so long as “something” happens, that we did “something.”

THESIS 2: Activism constructs a symbolic terrain of engagement in a conceptual space, one defined by a politics of complaint fused with an injunction to act against problems defined in a completely despatialized way.

By activism we do not mean that thing which leftists do. Rather, activism is defined by its enclosure within an absurd Kantian narrative of the so-called democratic space, in which opinion polls substitute for actual fighting, but the critique of activism can just as easily become containable within the limits of our disdain for leftists. We cannot equate the annoyances that are generated by leftists for activism. Rather, activism is an enjoinder to act politically against bad things whether that political act is the representation of discontent through theatrics and complaint, or as divergent from that as the assassination of an appropriately public figure as a sign of seriousness, encompassing activities on the political right as readily as on the left, and direct action as readily as protest. By this we mean that the bomber of an abortion clinic is likely every bit as much an activist as is the campaigner for women’s rights caught in the blast in that they both have constructed completely despatialized symbolic terrains within which to represent their discontent, merely differing as to their preferred symbols and the audience with whom they lodge their respective complaints.

Fundamentally, activism is based in the attempt to influence the symbolic operations of some unitarily defined concept-enemy that exists in an abstract and generalized terrain in which there are no local features, and in which logistical imbalance never occurs. The terrain of engagement becomes removed from the spaces within which actions occur, and the enemy becomes decentered from actual material things. It is not then a question of activists having a phobia of discussions of material fighting or narratives of effectiveness, discussions of terrain variance and police force movements, but rather it is that within their conceptual plane of engagement none of these things matter. It is not even that activists are unable to discuss these things, it is that within the conceptual limitations of activism they are nonsense.

THESIS 3: It is this formation that has led us to our current impasse, where attempts to transcend activism replicate the same formation but through actions of greater magnitude.

The move beyond activism is not effected by giving up the terms and tropes of the leftists. Activistic histrionics and theatrics find ample room to play amidst burning cars and glass filled streets, reminding us that a message can be wordless and an object can be a symbol too. Reacting to the lived conservatism of the left, by which we mean activists, it can be expected that the thinking will arise that one may transcend activism, by which we mean leftism, through simply going beyond the limits of the sort of actions they would be willing to undertake. Through bigger and more beautifully destructive displays the post-left activist constructs a mishmash collage by which to represent their disaffection. In this way shallow criticism allows activism to don new colors and appear under other banners, its essential strategic principles and tactical formations

unchanged. To be avoided is a mythology which pervades militancy in which institutions are treated as bodies through which one may strike blows, where linear escalations of force, *more smashy! Bigger bombs!*, are interpreted as directly increasing efficacy, as though blowing up the lobby of an IBM office disrupted the functional logistics of apartheid any more than smashing an ATM in the middle of the night disrupts banking.

THESIS 4: To overcome the impasse is not a question of moving past complaint into other forms of symbolic action against despatialized enemies, but of defining the enemy in an immediate and material sense.

Implicit in the operation of activism is the existence of a shared project to which the activist, their opponents, and various neutral entities are all party. An activist's enemies then are the particular set of abstract bad things they endeavor to set aright and their opponents are fellows who merely happen to be on the wrong side of the issue. By comparison, an insurgent's enemies are never abstract, but rather discrete entities of flesh, stone, or steel, from bodies to buildings, which at a specific time and place obstruct their interests. These enemies are not party to the insurgent's project and are instead defined by their exteriority to it, making elimination of the opposition the basic mode of conflict. Engagement with this sort of enemy is not defined by the effort toward annihilation in the sense that the enemy must die, or that things must be destroyed, but rather in such a way that they cease to be the enemy. This does not mean that there will be some Habermasian moment in which a sort of communicative commonality will form where everything becomes rational; conflict, action in itself, is arational as a material movement. Rather, this means that engagement with the enemy ends where they become logistically incapable of continuing to obstruct

our interests. At the point of total attenuation of their force, conflict evaporates, but this can only be an immediate calculation.

THESIS 5: To define the enemy in an immediate and material sense means moving beyond hatred or rejection into a posture of hostility, or an immediate antagonism, in this case hostility in relation to policing.

In defining the enemy we have to move beyond aligning ourselves against abstractions and into a posture of hostility toward enemies which are immediate and material. The enemy is that which is directly hostile toward one's objectives regardless of simple claims of political affinity. This means that in defining the enemy we must fundamentally shift our understanding of affinity, away from aligning ourselves along political theory or identity and into a conception which recognizes the potential presence of enemies all around us. This is clear to any of us that have dealt with the drudgery of working with liberals, only to find that they are a more effective force of deceleration than the actual uniformed police. Enemies surround us, but these enemies are not concepts, they are not the mythologized police as they are generally understood, the specter of the wealthy, or something like this. We do not fight ghosts and see no reason to become political exorcists: disembodied things cannot harm us.

Rather "enemy" is only a relevant categorization in relation to a material clash, finding its meaning in the immediacy of conflict itself, on a plane of engagement, in terms of where we fight, and when we fight. It is on this level that the enemy presents a direct threat, here that the enemy may be engaged, and it is only here that actual hostility exists. When we declare friends and enemies we are not merely claiming a structure of affinity, but more specifically we are distinguishing those we consider

able to aid in our objectives from those that will impede this line of flight. Friends need not even be those that we trust, but only those we can either work alongside, or whom we can use.

Class war can be an effective mythology, as Sorel discusses, but only to the degree that it generates conflict. In our case this conflict is not with the police as an abstract unity, but policing as an operation, as an actual logistics of force that functions in space and at a time. And for us this is a boon as to destroy the logistics of policing need not even require destroying police, necessarily, but only the disruption of their ability to manifest, to function in the streets. At the point that we understand the material operation of the police as it actually confronts us in our homes and on our streets to be the enemy then our engagement becomes immediate and material, arraying us against the effort to define our existences through force. At the point of immediacy everything breaks down to strategy and tactics, and on this level direct clash is not a fight we will, or can win, at least for now. But hostilities need not require direct frontal clash as an enemy, even a single body, is always also a logistical operation the disruption of which can be accomplished through smart subversion and intelligence as well as through direct fighting.

THESIS 6: This move into hostility requires a reattachment of action to the space and time of the act, the immediate and material tactical terrain formed by conflict

In reattaching the question of action to the actual dynamics of action we move back into the material, away from the symbolic, and have to completely realign our understandings of where we are fighting. In activism the terrain of conflict is formed around conceptual relationships; chasing the connections between some specific corporation and global

finance, demonstrating on Saturdays in an empty downtown where a bunch of liberals yell slogans at empty federal buildings, engaging in the game of attempting to “change consciousness” by openly debating some hopeless fascist conservative. All of these forms of action are founded on the myth of a symbolic enemy that we may fight on some general discursive terrain. What becomes lost is any actual engagement, which vanishes along with an understanding of where the enemy actually functions, how they function, and what the features of that terrain of functionality actually are.

Take for instance Deep Green Resistance, where the terrain of action is reduced to inert points on a map, “infrastructure”, that is thought of as an immobile terrain, a mentality that functions along the lines of strategic bombing, the reduction of targets to immobile points in space observed from 30,000 feet. Even within this metaphor they fail to grasp the functionality of strategic bombing in the age of the guided bomb which, understood through Parallel Strike doctrine, is an attempt to disrupt enemy command and control in order to set the stage for a material clash in a dynamic terrain, rather than as an end in itself. What is lost in this discussion of inert space, terrain reduced to maps, is that the enemy adapts, the enemy moves, the enemy rebuilds. Attack begets counterattack, and this continues until the enemy is unable to function, to move, to maintain a logistical ontology. To begin to make this move beyond inert conceptual enemies not only requires an understanding of the enemy in an immediate and material way, but also requires a recognition that all strategy becomes obsolete at the moment of clash; as Moltke said, “no plan of operations extends with any certainty beyond the first contact with the main hostile force.”

During hostilities the terrain becomes reconfigured by the very actions that are taken and adjustments must be made. On this level it is not only important to grasp the physical terrain, the features of terrain

and their variance, but it is also important to understand the dynamics in that terrain, the things that occur, the other forces present, whether they are antagonistic or not. We will never fully grasp this terrain, as single actors or collections thereof. At most we can, through intense intelligence gathering, come to understand some of the dynamics in a terrain, and develop a more or less effective way of making sense of things. In this we must never allow our abstractions to unmoor themselves from the material and, so liberated, wander away from us. And, if they do, by no means should we let ourselves be dragged off with them.

THESIS 7: The reattachment of action to the immediate and material separates the question of strategy/fighting from the question of why we fight, from the terrain understood conceptually

In the move away from symbolic terrains of engagement into a material understanding of action and conflict grounded in the immediacy of fighting, another fundamental shift must occur in which the meta-conceptual question of why we fight is separated from the question of what fighting is. Activists complete their absurd move into the symbolic with a simple assertion that we become our enemy if we are willing to employ the same means. Underlying this assertion is an odd sort of technological essentialism, one that mirrors the positions of futurists and primitivists, which would have us imagine a world where technologies have an essential content independent of their deployment. What is missed here is the use of means on the level of their positioning within a wider technics, one which must take into account the method and purpose of deployment, and the actual existence of a technology, or technique, as it developed in some particular historical moment in response to the dynamics of that history. We have to abandon the

Ghandian reduction that underlies this assumption of some necessary connection between means and goals, and come to understand something simple about conflict: the means of conflict take on meaning only within their deployment.

To be honest with ourselves, the ways that we make sense of the world are always interpretive, arbitrary, limited, and dynamic, in light of which the idea that we can understand the present, let alone some post-revolutionary future, is an absurdity. And this absurdity carries a danger along with it that far surpasses the limitation of weapons or means by ideological concerns. In the effort to speak the totality of the present or to plan some future that is supposed to occur after a series of events so catastrophic that the categories we use to make sense of life now are no longer relevant, whether revolution or collapse, we lose sight of some actual present, an immediate terrain of engagement of which we can at least attempt to make sense.

There is no ultimate tactic to be developed, no possibility that the past will recreate itself in the present or the future, no understanding what we have to do to cause shit to go down, there is no eternal moment and featureless terrain in which something like this could even be grounded or to which it could actually respond. There are only present capacities, present dynamics and some objective that we conceive as being important. Given that we cannot actually understand the totality of the world, or even of a single moment, “putting our ideals into action” is impossible; both due to the impossibility of this sort of unity or consensus in an actualized form, but also due to our inability to ever inscribe some necessary meaning into our actions; things occur, for innumerable reasons, and we are left the task of making sense of them in vain, from across the infinite distance that divides the concept from the moment.

We each have our reasons for engaging in the ways that we do, and it

is not as though we can opt out. We cannot opt out of history, everything we do sets the conditions for future moments. We cannot opt out of the social war; the state is a logistics of force that operates to the degree that this deployment of force is total. Warfare has become generalized in a shifting dynamics of innumerable immediate contingencies; it is on this level of immediate contingencies that engagement occurs; it is on this level that the decision must be made as to how we engage with total war. What side we each choose, whether we side with the state or with the insurgency, is one that we have to answer for ourselves, for our own arbitrary, provisional, conceptual reasons. The question of what this implies, as an immediate form of the decision, can only be answered in the moment of strategy, necessarily embedded as it is within the dynamics of this clash. We have to decouple action from passion and come to terms with the stakes and risks of fighting. Insurgency is neither romantic nor passionate, it is material, strategic, and often tragic. The ultimate tragedy is that we have been put in a position where this decision must be made at all, but once a decision is made, the conceptual question becomes secondary, trumped by the question of survival, and strategic movement.

THESIS 8: This realignment is the move from activism to insurgency

At its core the current and seemingly perpetual impasse, summarized in the the question of what is to be done, replicates the core of activism on a series of levels. The question itself, when spoken, implies an “us” that will answer this question, and a body of discursive engagement that exists on some consistent plane, replicating the mythology of consensus. More importantly the idea that there is even an answer to this question, one that can take hold on a wide scale, assumes a consistent terrain of engagement across time and space. It is here that all symbolic

engagements are fundamentally structured, on the level of thinking that we are fighting a common struggle together, assuming that we are fighting this in the same way, or that there is an essential commonality to the dynamics in which we fight.

To move beyond this series of assumptions, which cause us to replicate the failures of activism, means to re-conceive the fundamentals not only of what one does, but also the context in which one does them. This is not a question of whether we should engage with activism in some general sense, whether the “movement” is something we should take part in, or a question of the foci or the underground. These discussions all, still, assume a generalized symbolic terrain of engagement in which it is tacitly understood that theoretical efficacy may be equated with material effectiveness. But there is no right tactic, nor universal form of engagement, and certainly no answer to the question of “what is to be done.” We must abandon the entire symbolic terrain of action itself, but this does not mean that we must abandon engaging with activism. Activism can be an effective tactic in escalation, as Maraghella discusses, but it does mean that we have to abandon activism as an assumed mode of engagement, and begin to ground ourselves in actual dynamics and in a hostility toward the immediate enemy. This means embracing insurgency, an immediate material engagement on an immediate and material terrain, one focused on strategy rather than abstract political theory; a reorientation of the question of action and waiting around engaging when and how engagement is strategic, and only to generate the maximum effect.

We should not fool ourselves, we are facing nothing less than a war; one without defined battlefields, without limit and without end. A war so all pervasive that it conditions our possibilities for existence, that it has become the standard for normalcy. This is a war that structures our terrain, inspires our cities, and organizes our lines of movement through

space. It is a war, and nothing less, and it is on that plane that we must conceive our engagement. Pithy attempts to engage with passion are often poorly thought out, and just as often contact no strategic points of intervention. We see this often with the glorified lone wolf or the urban guerrilla, with their symbolic strikes against a symbolic enemy whatever their very material consequences. This engagement with the dynamics of history, in all their immediacy, in all of their materiality, is the shift from activism to insurgency.

THESIS 9: Insurgency is not something that can be defined in itself, except as an immediate and material engagement of hostility toward the immediate enemy within a context of warfare

To be an insurgent means re-evaluating our relationship to so-called social movements, and also our role outside of them. For example, liberals are not allies; even though there is often confusion on this question. Fundamentally, their goals always involve some paternalistic attempt to define everyday life, and to use the state to do so; it should then be no surprise that they often work with the police. This does not mean that they cannot be used, or that engagement with social movements may not be effective, but to be able to re-evaluate the relationship that any of us may have to social movements we have to re-conceive of what the so-called social movements are, and this requires a move away from understanding them as a necessity toward the conception of them as a tactic, a form of engagement that has dramatic limitations, but that may not be all together useless given the right conditions. But, to move to this point means moving beyond defining what we are doing as a thing that exists in some consistent way across time and space.

We have already discussed the need to move beyond the question

of what is to be done, to recognize the particularity of the means and dynamics of engagement to specific terrains with which they evolve in parallel; the need to move beyond activism and into insurgency, an immediate engagement with the enemy in a context of warfare. But, as we make this move we have to be careful not to fall into the trap of defining insurgency as a thing, as some abstract object, as a series of tactics, as necessarily one thing or another outside of the immediacy of engagement. Insurgency is neither violent nor not, neither symmetrical nor not, neither armed nor unarmed. Insurgency is not a thing to be thought, but a form of engagement which plays out in a hostility toward the enemy, and reveals itself in a posture toward the war that finds us, wherever we are, in our everyday lives.

When we speak about the necessity of moving from activism to insurgency we are not speaking of an increased militancy; militancy can be just as dangerous as pacifism and is a form of activism in its own right. Rather we are speaking of the need to avoid the tragedy of the Red Army Faction just as much as the tragedy of Occupy, the need to abandon symbolic terrains of engagement, in which we struggle against unspecific enemies on abstract political terrain through the elaboration of our passions. We are speaking of the necessity of grounding our understanding of what we are doing, separate from that of why we are doing it, in the space in which things actually occur, in the here and now, and to make the effort to base this engagement on concerns of strategy, of hostility toward the enemy in some specific sense, rather than some effort to make a point, “speak truth to power” or whatever might pass for action otherwise. We are speaking of a posture toward the enemy in which we strike when we have the advantage, wait when we do not, and use the means that will accomplish our objectives, rather than those which will leave us unburdened by conscience.

ON DEEP GREEN FAILURES OF THE PROBLEM OF INERT STRATEGY

"We tend to destroy our leaders with criticism, often personal and vicious."

- Lierre Keith, Deep Green Resistance

LOOTING THE CORPSES THAT COME BEFORE YOU

I'm not here to praise or condemn Caesar, but to make sure he stays buried. Often when a movement falls (and Deep Green Resistance is very much falling) there is a "nostalgic" tendency to attempt to exhume the corpse and at least loot it for a few precious baubles. Part of this necrophilia is the belief that to have persisted or to have attained some notability entails a certain degree of competence or at least some tactic, organizing principle or strategy that is worth taking one last look over the corpse for, even if the wake is purely unsympathetic looting paired with a squabble over what went wrong, finally degenerating into an amateur autopsy. Perhaps this metaphor a trifle too abstract; in concrete terms,

while DGR is busily being torn down for their authoritarianismⁱ and transphobiaⁱⁱ there are quite a few people either within DGR or outside of it who still believe that DGR's promotion of itself as "an analysis, a strategy, and a movement" works as a cohesive whole, albeit one much better off without Lierre Keith and Derrick Jensen and their particular set of baggage. Rather than, like a vulture, picking apart the well-trod and well documented examples of DGR's weaknesses, it is my intention to address the strongest point of DGR (fusing their analysis, actions and movement into a coherent whole) so we can be done with this shibboleth once and for all. The idea that DGR was strong given the unique way it interwove analysis, tactics and group identity is debatable. In theory, DGR provided its members with an actionable and concrete strategy based on attainable goals, individual and collective security and a gradual amplification of conflict that is, (again, in theory), a good method for dismantling capitalism and its attendant ecological devastation. With that in mind, let us get to the quite literal heart of the matter (DGR's titular production *Deep Green Resistance: Strategy to Save the Planet*), pry it open, and glance into how theory met practice and spawned such a persistent organization.¹

One of the problems with analysis of DGR as an organization is that those analyzing it often profile the actions of the organization by a standard other than the one proposed by DGR itself. DGR as a document is the bedrock that informs the understanding held by DGR the organization, and therefore quite directly determines their course of action. This is why often the actions taken by DGR are "illogical" from an outside viewpoint. In a sense, it is impossible to loot anything of value from DGR because all of the things considered abhorrent about

1 Insofar as DGR was published in 2011 and shortly spawned a fairly large movement, 3 or so years is quite a long time and even with all of the criticism the group draws it hasn't spectacularly collapsed into nothingness even if it is certainly far less prominent than it once was.

the organization (transphobia, authoritarianism, self-important bluster, etc.) are tied up in the literal material production of the organization. While we will be focusing on the tactical blunders entailed in this ideology it is worth noting that the embarrassing viewpoints expressed by Derrick Jensen & Lierre Keith² are completely and utterly bound up in every element of DGR as it has existed.

TWO TRUTHS AND TWO LIES

One of the reasons that DGR is so successful in drawing adherents, and why there is such a zealous crusade by their members to defend the good names of Derrick Jensen and Lierre Keith, is the way in which *DGR* (as an analysis) places an amazing onus on individuals to combat industrial civilization and frames this showdown in terms of a tiny conscientious (perhaps elect) minority against the entire world. This is quite simply drawn together from DGR's textual adherence to two truths and two lies. The first truth is simply that: "The dominant culture—civilization is killing the planet, and it is long past time for those of us who care about life on earth to begin taking the actions necessary to stop this culture from destroying every living being."ⁱⁱⁱ Here *DGR* does not really find itself in disagreement with most of the anarchist movement (or even, to be honest, most of the mild left and some conservatives), and it is undoubtedly true that industrial society has wreaked havoc on the environment. This central truth is echoed throughout the text, both in terms of raw numbers (whether of deforestation or animal depopulation) and poetic imagery (as many critics have pointed out, frequently dealing with the last salmon gasping its last breath); reiteration of this point is so much a part of *DGR* that

2 Aric McBay left the organization over differences of opinion with both Keith and Jensen

listing all of the times it is brought up would be simply tedious (it is the sole content of the first two chapters and is utilized to underscore almost every point made by Keith, McBay and Jensen).

The second truth is that “We don’t live in a democracy. And before you gasp at this blasphemy, ask yourself: Do governments better serve corporations or living beings?”^{iv} While this is also undoubtedly true and also a classic anarchist argument, from these points *DGR* diverges extensively from an anarchist analysis. For *DGR*, one of the central problems faced by the environment is that “this culture will not undergo any sort of voluntary transformation to a sane and sustainable way of living.”^v Although the text meanders quite a bit before defining this, for *DGR* a “sane and sustainable way of living” is suicide for many individuals (including author Derrick Jensen). As outlined in *DGR*, industrial society as a whole is untenable. Any attempt to reduce environmental damage would simply end in responsible corporations being outcompeted by those with fewer environmental scruples, and many of the most destructive practices are underwritten by governments to keep them economically tenable.³ However, the replacement *DGR* proposes is equally grim (by some measures) because it is such a rapid change. This is largely stated somewhat cryptically, such as Keith’s statement that “human population must be reduced” with the corollary statement that “if we don’t do it voluntarily, the world will reduce it for us. Even at Stone Age, solar-fueled levels of consumption, there are billions more people than the planet can support.”^{vi} However, her target number involves a little over 7/8ths of the human population disappearing.⁴ Derrick Jensen fields the question of mass death⁵ with the blithe equivocation that we are all murderers anyway (because we

3 Cf. *DGR*, 51

4 “A truly sustainable number would be somewhere between 300 and 600 million.” (*DGR*; 210; Keith estimates the world’s population at roughly 8 billion).

5 *DGR*, 422-424

are complicit in the industrial system that is killing the environment and by extension persons). Although he somewhat softens the impact of the statement by speaking both of the extensive death rate caused by industrial capitalism and the unavoidable catastrophe of resource depletion, along with some generalities about how DGR will enable individuals to start using subsistence farming almost immediately (because in their analysis capitalism collapses in and we immediately start pulling up asphalt lots to make community gardens). This first lie, that there is no possibility of voluntary change, is partially rooted in truth. That is, there is little prognosis of generating a world-wide year zero in which almost everyone returns to a pre-industrial society pretty much immediately. The desirability of such a society (and whether this is the only possible solution to the overdraw on natural resources) is highly debatable, but by taking it as a core truth DGR is able to extrapolate that their organization is the only one capable of saving the planet from environmental devastation. Therefore, Lierre Keith states that: “[she is] not attempting to create panic or survivalism. Neither will help. [She is] attempting to create a resistance movement with a strategy that can address the scale of the problem.”^{vii} This resistance movement is naturally DGR and can only be DGR, as Keith rhetorically states near the closing of *DGR*: “This is the question on which the world entire may depend: Are you willing to accept the only strategy left to us?”^{viii} This rhetorical gesture neatly ties these strands together. If one accepts the two truths to the argument of *DGR* and then take the leap that there is no way people will voluntarily adapt the society envisioned in the document, the only option is the sort of environmentalism embodied by DGR one which fuses this worldview into an authoritarian tactical organization which through its cohesive position is capable of destroying industrial society.

ENVIRONMENTALISM AS A PANACEA THAT CURES ALL ILLS

This leads us into a somewhat thorny point, one that is not tactical in nature yet is vital for understanding the tactical failures inherent in DGR. *DGR's* framing of resistance entails an acceptance of the proposition that all oppressions are co-extensive with industrial development or at a bare minimum are amplified and entrenched by the existence of industrial capitalism. That is, somewhat puzzlingly, *DGR* seemingly argues that misogyny and racism are products of industrial society and curtails much of its critique of the inequalities perpetuated by capitalism to being the products of a specifically industrial capitalist system. This leads them to the somewhat paradoxical position of being tacitly anti-capitalist, yet advocating complete war against the industrial capitalist state while adopting small scale capitalism and actively purchasing land from the federal government (see below). Crudely put, the entirety of *DGR* is anti-industrial and only secondarily anti-capitalist or feminist. This is reflected in their (correct) statement that “industrialization is a process of taking entire communities of living beings and turning them into commodities and dead zones.”^x However, for them industrialization is distinct from capitalism (apparently the mass die off of the world's human population is not unthinkable, but calling oneself anti-capitalist is simply a bridge too far). This is perplexing because it makes their analysis of their own targets somewhat incoherent. As they state, “[our] goal is not to bring down the US government or any government,” even though centralized governments are one of the primary supporters of environmental devastation by their own analysis.^x *DGR* puts the cart before the horse in terms of understanding their own conflict. They are opposed to multinational corporations tearing resources from the earth (particularly coal and oil) or devastating the ozone layer by burning fossil fuels (especially in terms of the national power grid)

and toxifying groundwater and contributing to the overtaxing of arable land or destroying old growth forests or the ocean floor (factory farming, clear cut logging and industrial fishing respectively). While all of these processes, to varying extents, are the actions of multinational corporations, the decision making process is based in a capitalist logic of market incentivization (specifically seeking high immediate yields regardless of long term impact) and backed by the power of governments (most of the processes that the federal government is dependent on are implicated in these industries). *DGR's* analysis is ultimately missing the forest for the trees.

The problematic nature of separating industrialization from capitalism is also reflected in their analysis of the particularities of oppression. For example, while colonialism and its attendant racism is decried, what seems far more galling to the writers of *DGR* is the collective destruction of the environment that stemmed from this. In terms of the feminism that is a central tenet of *DGR*, Keith (who does most of the heavy lifting on the subject) seems to be a firm believer that pre-industrial societies are gender egalitarian if not matriarchal. As Marvin Harris notes in *Cows, Pigs, Wars and Witches*, the problem with this argument is that no one “has ever been able to authenticate a single case that is representative of true matriarchy. The only evidence... aside from ancient myths about Amazons, is that about 10 to 15 percent of the world’s societies trace kinship and descent exclusively through females.”^{xi} While the position of women, he notes, tends to be better in these societies they are still male dominated.

However, tactically *DGR* is able to draw quite a bit from their insistence that all social ills are derived from industrialization rather than the conditions that gave rise to industrialization.⁶ Specifically, the theoretical system that *DGR* positions itself against is based around

6 Cf. Scott, James C. *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*

things like industrial agriculture, logging, fishing, and centralized power grids rather than governments and their symbiotic partner capitalism. This constructs a more tractable opposition for DGR because they are not in conflict with the whole of society (including its police and military) but rather only with certain earth destroying industries (which in their analysis can be viewed as distinct from the state as though, for example, coal mining weren't parasitically attached to the government both for the continuation of the power grid that their industry feeds but also through the hand-in-glove relationship between the coal industry and the local governments in coal mining regions).⁷

This simplification of conflict allows for the dualism propagated by *DGR* between Liberalism and Radicalism, with *DGR* positioning the Radical camp as the appropriate solution to the problem.⁸ Accepting the earlier tenets of the *DGR* analysis, even the ones which are patently false, allows for the next important rhetorical move: the argument that DGR's actions/strategy are coherent with its analysis and their efficacy is drawn from being radical, in the Latin sense of addressing the source of the problem. In this sense, radical means viewing problems as being inherently collective and produced via power (in a sort of crude Foucaultian analysis) rather than being individual and thus incapable of being changed through individual action (Keith specifically makes a big deal out of consumer choices as a faux activism incapable of addressing the scope of the problem of our catastrophic environmental impact). If individual (liberal) actions are untenable, and DGR has already emerged fully formed as our last, best hope, DGR's radicalism is an inherent part of the process. By utilizing this metaphysics, regardless of the numerous

7 Will Potter's work on federal gag laws against whistle blowers covering the meat industry would also be a pertinent point beyond the scope of this paper.

8 Covering this schism in depth, especially its conceptual incoherence, is simply beyond the scope of this paper.

incoherencies in their analysis⁹ or even patent falsehoods, *DGR* moves on to illuminate their own strategy. A strategy which often falls short of its lofty goals because it is completely intertwined with an inability to identify a completely integrated set of enemies instead isolating a particular problem and looking at it non-holistically, thus setting the stage for a problematic conception of tactics.

A TACTICAL ANALYSIS (BASED ON UNWARRANTED COMPARISON)

Because *DGR* views itself as a singular entity with the sole purpose of taking down industrial civilization, which as previously stated they erroneously believe can be separated from institutions such as capitalism and the state, it also couches its analysis of revolutionary movements in fallacious comparisons, specifically by repeatedly and inappropriately comparing themselves to the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND). Lierre Keith's set of rhetorical closing questions frequently evokes the comparison¹⁰ and the text is littered with glowing reviews of MEND as an organization. Some of this is based on a misconception of the organization of MEND (Keith repeatedly insists it is a totalizing organization rather than an umbrella group) and contradicting many of the actual aims of the organization (*DGR* repeatedly insists that they are interested in the cessation of oil production in the Niger Delta rather than a greater share of the wealth from oil extraction staying in the area and being distributed to those impacted).

Thus *DGR*'s analysis that "MEND is willing to say to the oil industry, "Leave our land or you will die in it" has some truth to it, but also is fundamentally misstating the aims of MEND.^{xii} To some extent, this is

9 And quite a few that are not even given coverage here, given that it often seems like Jensen, Keith and McBay are writing at cross purposes. Covering this schism in depth,

10 *DGR*, 494-495

because the construction of MEND in *DGR* is a projection of the writers fantasies, specifically the fantasies of a “culture of resistance,” that is their idea that in order to build a broad based activist movement there must already be a culture opposed to whatever the activists are working against (*DGR*’s most pertinent example of this is the continuous struggle of Ireland against British colonial rule). For *DGR* resistance to oil extraction began with the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) under the direction of Ken Saro-Wiwa against the collaboration between Shell and the Nigerian government and cumulating in Saro-Wiwa’s execution by the Nigerian government. Thus, MEND “is the second generation of the resistance. They conduct direct attacks against workers, bridges, office sites, storage facilities, rigs and pipelines, and support vessels”^{xiii} However poetic this imagery may be, the execution of Saro-Wiwa is never mentioned by any members of MEND in any statements they have given nor does the organization trace any lineage from the MOSOP nor, in fact, does the organization highlight the issues faced by the Ogoni people; the only real similarity between these movements is that they are opposed to the collaboration between their government (by not enforcing regulations) and oil companies (in extracting wealth from their lands) yet MEND has not made any real movement towards criticizing the damage caused by oil extraction (a central piece of Saro-Wiwa’s analysis) and despite their occasional bombing of pipelines they are primarily concerned with kidnapping and ransoming oil company employees and siphoning oil for sale on the black market, hardly a reflection of the puritanical anti-industrialization stance held by *DGR*.¹¹ *DGR*’s MEND has nothing to do with MEND as an actual organization but instead is an angel of history that represents the best course of action for the radical anti-industrialization

11 For more information on MEND it is worth consulting: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/4732210.stm>, <http://www.economist.com/node/12267373> and especially <http://www.irinnews.org/report/84512/nigeria-thousands-flee-violence-hundreds-suspected-dead> which deals with the collateral damage of MEND’s actions

movement. It is not my point here to vilify MEND (who are born out of the conditions of many movements that are exploited by industrial capitalism: desperation and poverty) but to illustrate how wrongheaded the analysis presented by *DGR* is. MEND is cherry picked and massaged for *DGR* consumption because much of the text of *DGR* is dedicated to poking holes in the theories of other groups.

While an overwhelming part of the *DGR* analysis is based in the failures of previous revolutionary movements, *DGR* collectively fails to offer more than a throwaway analysis of recent direct action revolutionary environmental movements in the United States. Many relevant individuals and organizations are neglected in favor of an exhaustive discussion of the American Revolution, the Civil Rights Movement, the IRA, MEND, and the early suffragette movement. Notable exclusions are: Earth Liberation Front (ELF), Animal Liberation Front (ALF), Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty (SHAC), People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), along with theorists such as John Zerzan, Murray Bookchin, Freddy Perlman and Feral Faun. Firstly, we will address the ways in which *DGR* neglects to analyze relevant theorists. While *DGR* is, ostensibly, a theoretical document (that is, regardless of the protests of the authorial collective, *DGR* is a work of theory even if that theory is wedded to praxis), *DGR* notably evades sustained theoretical discourse with pretty much any thinker who would be considered foundational for contemporary radical environmentalism, especially primitivists.¹² In some cases this is because most of the thinkers work is anathema to *DGR*, specifically Bookchin, whom they frequently borrow from but never credit.¹³ This is perhaps because his conception of municipal libertarianism rests on gradual, democratic social change and

12 There is some debate over whether or not Primitivism is an actual anarchist movement and because this is such a dead horse I have no interest in debating the topic.

13 Specifically their conception of Radical versus Liberal solutions is suspiciously similar, without any acknowledgement, to his conception of social versus lifestyle anarchism; additionally, much of the history of Spanish Anarchism in *DGR* draws from his writings because they fit their ideological mold, although this is beyond the scope of this paper.

views many forms of direct action as individualistic terrorism and contrary to the goals of Social Anarchism. Additionally, Bookchin was *extremely* critical of deep ecology, which he denounced as being both mystical and callous, especially in its cavalier attitude towards a mass human die off.

Zerzan,¹⁴ on the other hand, advocates for the total destruction of industrial society and a return to hunter/gatherer societies along with the abolition of technology writ large (ranging from industrial agriculture to mathematics). However, Zerzan (along with other primitivists) have faced a number of persistent challenges to their vision, which Chaz Bufe articulates quite well in his piece “Listen Anarchist.”:

A notable feature of the anti-technology fringe is their refusal to get down to specifics. They’ll spend thousands upon thousands of words attacking technology in the abstract, but will rarely discuss specific aspects of it. When they do, they invariably pick the easiest possible targets, things such as nuclear and automotive technologies, technologies which are so obviously and overwhelmingly harmful that they would be drastically reduced if not eliminated outright in any type of sane society.^{xiv}

DGR is exceedingly opaque about what tools are classified as technology, and even their post-industrial collapse goal “To defend and rebuild just, sustainable, and autonomous human communities, and, as part of that, to assist in the recovery of the land” is remarkably nebulous.^{xv} This quote brings to mind another persistent critique of Zerzan, that there is no guarantee that the society produced post-industrialization would be any more egalitarian than the one we presently occupy. It is unclear why *DGR* does not address critiques that have been circulating of intellectual movements similar to theirs for almost two decades before

14 In the interests of space I am focusing on Zerzan and evading discussing the work of Perlman and Feral Faun, while their omission is worth noting it is simply exhaustive to cover it in depth.

its publication. (One can only assume the authors are reluctant to admit they stole the ideas in the first place.)

Such critiques do not address whether or not DGR's tactics are effective, only the desirability of their assumed outcome. *DGR* unequivocally states that the aim of their tactics is to "disrupt and dismantle industrial civilization; to thereby remove the ability of the powerful to exploit the marginalized and destroy the planet."^{xvi} In order to accomplish this lofty (if ill-defined) goal, Aric McBay¹⁵ turns to a variety of manuals on military tactics and guerrilla warfare in order to develop the tactical party line espoused in *DGR*. While *DGR* is ostensibly concerned with tactical efficacy rather than tactical morality; that is, with the immediate outcome of an action rather than collateral damage,¹⁶ *DGR* still has a strange moralism underlying their analysis of strategy and tactics. Lierre Keith, for example, is distressed by the idea of symbolic (as she reads it) violence against private property, relating how she has "been at demonstrations where young men smashed windows of mom and pop grocery stores and set fire to random cars in the neighborhood. This is essentially violence as a form of self-expression-for a very entitled self. Such random acts of destruction against people who are not the enemy have no place in our strategy or in our culture."^{xvii} In her analysis, these actions are pointless because they fail to accomplish the concrete goals set out by *DGR* and are actions taken out for personal or symbolic reasons. Setting aside the gender essentialism and strangely moralistic tone, this is an excellent transition to *DGR*'s tactical analysis.

Aric McBay is enamored with a somewhat dated set of military maxims specifically the idea of a decisive attack. For McBay, this means

15 Various sections of *DGR* are predominately written by particular members of the editorial collective and the heavy lifting of military strategy seems to have fallen on Aric McBay.

16 For example, their willingness to bite the bullet that Decisive Ecological Warfare will end in the deaths of over 7 billion people.

the ideal DGR action is one where overwhelming force is applied to a critical juncture in industrial functioning rendering it useless.¹⁷ This is presented with the somewhat simplistic idea that DGR “must engage those in power where we are strong and they are weak. We must strike when we have overwhelming force, and maneuver instead of engaging when we are outmatched.”^{xviii} Partially this rests on analysis of industrialism as an inert set of locations where particularly odious industrial processes take place (clear cut logging, coal extraction, etc.). However, what is most important for *DGR* is that the analysis taken by the organization mirror that of military thinking to maximize efficiency; as McBay states: “the military strategist has the same broad objective as the radical strategist: to use the decisive application of force to accomplish a task.”^{xix} Thus there are two central factors at work: firstly, DGR is committed to strategically attainable goals that rest on a decisive action targeting industrial society where it is weak, and secondly, the way of analyzing how to carry out these actions is to utilize militarized understandings of targets, which means eschewing symbolic action for a utilitarian calculus of damage. In order to understand this better we will examine DGR’s analysis and classification of actions and *DGR*’s role in them.

Within *DGR*’s analysis actions are broken down into decisive operations, that is quasi-military operations that accomplish a final goal (such as the complete shutdown of the power grid, although *DGR* admits to smaller decisive operations such as planting a garden depending on the scale of a goal), sustaining operations which work to support and assist those carrying out decisive operations, and shaping operations “which help to create the conditions necessary for success.”^{xx} For the purposes of this section we will be focusing on decisive operations, although much of the case for DGR’s organizational structure is tied up in their conception

17 McBay reviews military terminology in DGR 346-48

of sustaining and shaping operations. *DGR* also differentiates between aboveground and underground actions. While they apply the same three categories of action to aboveground organizational structures, clandestine decisive actions are (for *DGR*) the big payoff and therefore deserve more in-depth coverage. Here *DGR* is generally correct in their analysis of decisive actions, although the act of projecting a concrete outcome (rather than accepting that actions can have multiple unpredictable results) tends to limit *DGR*'s scope of actions. By creating a section on target selection, McBay is acknowledging that there is a variety of tactical considerations to any target (and that purely symbolic targets are not always effective). Most importantly, McBay asks the question "what target(s) can be disrupted or destroyed to cause maximum damage to the entire enemy system?"^{xxi} For McBay, these are targets which are difficult to replace (recuperability) and which are essential for some part of the industrial process (criticality). Additionally, to be decisive they should have a fairly extensive effect on an entire network of industrial processes.

Additionally, despite the moralistic tone that *DGR* takes in rejecting smashing the windows of "mom and pop" stores, McBay does explicitly state that the destruction of machines is a non-violent act especially when considering the loss of life, human, animal and environmental that industrialization inflicts according to *DGR*'s analysis. Furthermore McBay opens up the topic of assassination and intimidation as valid tactics. While the coverage is somewhat brief, extolling how various organizations effectively integrated targeted assassination into their destabilizing efforts breaks with the history of the extreme wing of the environmentalist movement. That is, while ELF, ALF, SHAC, et al. are considered domestic terrorist organizations, none of them have given the go-ahead to killing individuals, although they have some history of intimidation and stalking as a political tactic. *DGR* stresses tactical utility of attacks and refuses to disavow certain tactics (provided they

are effective). What remains interesting then, is *DGR*'s almost complete failure to contrast their conception of tactics with those of other direct action radical environmentalist groups.

For *DGR*, groups such as ELF, ALF and SHAC warrant little mention because such groups are largely ineffective. McBay states that:

One of the reasons that the Earth Liberation Front (ELF) has had limited decisive success so far is that its targets have had low criticality and high recuperability. New suburban subdivisions are certainly crimes against ecology, but partially constructed homes are not very important to those in power, and they are relatively replaceable. The effect is primarily symbolic, and it's hard to find a case in which a construction project has actually been given up because of ELF activity – although it may have certainly been made more expensive.^{xxii}

Contrary to the dismissive tone taken by *DGR*, the federal government is quite concerned with ELF (and similar groups) as it was considered notable that “radical actors affiliated with ELF and ALF caused more than \$110 million in damage between approximately 1995 and 2005.”^{xxiii} If this is not convincing enough ELF makes up 37% of Eco-Terrorist activity in the United States and was described as “one of today's most serious domestic terrorism threats” by the FBI in 2005.^{xxiv} How can we account for this contrast in tones?

AN AUTHORITARIAN STRUCTURE INCAPABLE OF ADAPTATION

Because of the nature of a decisive attack in *DGR*, that is, an attack which completely and permanently stops a process rather than hindering it, delaying it, or making it simply more expensive, *DGR* is able to avoid

addressing the successes of other groups by an act of goalpost moving. McBay essentially argues that industrialism is a complete and integrated system, rather than more realistically a variety of practices, businesses, individuals, government agencies and more which act with a set of competing and occasionally co-operative aims; thus, if industrialism is a symbolic whole, attacks on the periphery (like members of ELF torching construction projects, SUVs, etc. or members of ALF freeing animals from feedlots or testing facilities) are easy to dismiss because they do not completely paralyze the workings of industrial civilization. From this analysis McBay makes the following argument for a centralized organization running things:

A massively coordinated set of actions is fundamentally different from an uncoordinated set of the same actions. Complex systems respond in a nonlinear fashion. They can adapt and maintain equilibrium in the face of small insults, minor disruptions. But beyond a certain point, **increasing attacks undermine the entire system, causing widespread failure or collapse.** Because of this, coordination is perhaps the most compelling argument for underground networks over mere isolated cells.^{xv}

There are a number of problematic aspects to this line of thinking which I will attempt to elucidate while drawing in the fundamental weakness of *DGR*'s organizational nature. Firstly, McBay's conception of a mass organization that can direct all actions runs contrary to anarchist thinking on direct action, and while a long form debate on the subject is beyond the scope of this essay, it is worthwhile to read his idea against the insurrectionist model of diffuse direct action. A Murder of Crows in "Fire at Midnight; Destruction at Dawn" lay out a fundamentally insurrectionist counter-reading of isolated and individually inspired actions, arguing that:

One of the oldest and most destructive acts of revolt is sabotage. To be clear, we define sabotage as the deliberate act of destroying or damaging physical structures. From workplace machinery sabotage to monkey-wrenching housing and industrial developments, to smashing a window at a bank, fur store or cop station, sabotage has become a common and well-dispersed instrument of social struggle. This tactic is often used to achieve a greater goal, or employed within a larger campaign or a struggle. **However, the potential of destructive direct action lies in its ability to be carried out individually or in groups without any need or desire for formal organization, hierarchy, or campaign to act in unison with. Sabotage, like all tactics, should be easily reproducible, therefore increasing the possibility of its spread. This spreading threatens the structures of power precisely because it is difficult to manage and contain.** Sabotage can be used in all situations, in all terrains, and by anyone who wishes to use it. It requires no specialization or skill, just initiative.^{xxvi}

Both arguments contain roughly the same point but from completely opposed trains of thought. For McBay individual actions without a grand organizing platform will always be ineffectual because they cannot bring about collapse in a singular attack, while from an anarchist standpoint the proliferation of attack from a variety of groups for a variety of purposes will eventually bring some sort of decisive end but the idea of a centralized planning committee directing things runs counter to an anti-authoritarian politics. An example of the anarchist view of how such an action could come about is found in the coverage of the Bolt Weevils in “Fire at Midnight; Destruction at Dawn.” In the 1970s a 435 mile power line was to be constructed in order to feed suburban areas around Minneapolis and St. Paul with little concern for how “farmers along the proposed route of the power line viewed the project as sacrificing

their land to feed energy-hungry urban centers. The state was planning to expropriate 160-foot-wide swaths through their fields and erect 180-foot pylons to support the wires.¹⁸ When legal resistance to this project failed farmers took to sabotage, shooting out insulators and taking down towers at such a rate that the electrical company had to turn the project over to the federal government to get it finished. While it can be pointed out that this action ultimately failed, the power line was constructed, it took an exceptional amount of effort to finish this project and no arrests were made. Rather than viewing it as a failure, one can contrarily look at the success involved in delaying such a project and requiring such expense for it to reach completion. Sabotage in this case is illustrative of how an elite or tasked vanguard is unnecessary and how the proliferation of “petty” acts of sabotage can greatly increase cost. On the other hand, *DGR* believes that such attacks are doomed to failure because industrial civilization can adapt to these dispersed attacks and continue grinding along.¹⁸

For an example of an attempted decisive operation we turn to last year’s attack on the west coast power grid, in which 17 transformers were shot out at an electrical substation in San Jose, CA, in an apparent attempt to knock out power in Silicon Valley and perhaps touch off a cascading chain of outages across the region. This would appear to fit *DGR*’s definition of a decisive attack, and against one of their favorite targets at that. The attack failed, and despite speculation in the press that it was merely a “dress rehearsal” does not seem to have been repeated in the last year plus. This illustrates another problem with decisive attacks – they take a lot more planning and preparation than minor acts of sabotage, and if they fail all of the time, effort, and risk that went into them is wasted.

18 NB *DGR*, 461-468

If we accept for a moment that there needs to be an organization to co-ordinate attacks on industrial society how is DGR to fulfill that role? By *DGR*'s estimation, the necessity of a large scale organization is rooted in the fact that: "Larger organizations have a better capacity for sustaining operations (and decisive operations, for that matter) than individuals and small groups, but they rarely apply it effectively. Internal conflicts limit operations to the lowest common denominator: the lowest risk, the lowest level of internal controversy, and the lowest level of effectiveness."^{xxviii} While *DGR* is critical of large institutions, to some extent they seek to mirror them at least in terms of membership, because they see a broad based movement (and a large number of participants) as a compelling means of meeting their objectives. The first somewhat startling part of the organizational plan is that *DGR* is intended to be an aboveground movement committed to shaping and sustaining operations (see above) while simultaneously having firewalled-off cadres who engage in underground actions. Partially this is because they see numbers as being a critical part of success (although they admit that their projected rate of participation is proportionally small) and partially it is because they see aboveground and underground organizations under the *DGR* umbrella as being able to work in lockstep to fulfill their organizational goals. This approach reflects *DGR*'s messianic character; that is, for *DGR* one of the conditions for success is creating a culture of resistance¹⁹ as "a framework that provides meaning" which gives purpose to actions and provides a groundwork from which a far more robust resistance movement can spring (it also should magically inoculate participants against burnout).^{xxix} Thus, for *DGR* a frequent comparable is the IRA, which rather than a diffuse set of actors with similar principles (such as Sinn Féin and Cumann na mBan) along with completely separate organizations based on cultural revival is instead conceived of as a total organization that *DGR* seeks to emulate. If this mythological capacity to

19 Cf 113 - 191

be an almost infinite number of organizations with completely different agendas is possible, *DGR* argues there is a great benefit to it. As they rhetorically ask when considering the possibility of resistance taking root “What if there was a serious aboveground resistance movement combined with a small group of underground networks working in tandem?”^{xxx} Within the framework of Decisive Ecological Warfare (the end goal of *DGR*, see below) the answer is: quite a lot. One of the major advantages for *DGR* to a large aboveground network is quite obvious: it works to recruit new members to become radical actionists and it can provide resources to those groups along with support work. One especially important role of an aboveground movement for *DGR* is fostering militancy and normalizing radical resistance. As noted in the four phase action plan, above ground activists can “push for acceptance and normalization of more militant and radical tactics where appropriate. They vocally support sabotage when it occurs. More moderate advocacy groups use the occurrence of sabotage to criticize those in power for failing to take action on critical issues like climate change (rather than criticizing the saboteurs).”^{xxxi} Also, aboveground organizations can make connections with people who are not direct action participants and engage in work to lessen the catastrophic (human) impact of industrial collapse.

The other major reason that *DGR* is so enamored with organizational structure is their insistence that “real movements require leaders. Despite all the contempt that contemporary radicals heap on anyone who rises to a public position, leaders emerge. A collection of individuals, no matter how angry or inspired will remain inchoate without language and ineffective without direction.”^{xxxi} Without the direction provided by leadership, and the language from their leaders to form a culture of resistance, *DGR* argues that movements will remain scattered and ineffectual. Therefore, leadership is a reality for *DGR* that is completely inseparable from efficiency. As Lierre Keith bluntly puts it “underground

groups engaged in coordinated or paramilitary activities require hierarchy” although she seems to be ignoring contemporary advances in military theory which state that self-directing small units are far more responsive than large ones directed by a single commander.^{xxxiii} *DGR* also believes that aboveground organizations with their constant grooming of new recruits will be necessary because otherwise the leadership cannot be replaced when the government, knowing the importance of leaders, kills them. Derrick Jensen elucidates *DGR*’s thinking when he argues that the role of leaders, specifically the leaders of *DGR*, is to “put big bull’s-eye targets on our chests so that we can help to form a culture of resistance. Our role is to be public.”^{xxxiv} This sounds nice, especially the idea that Derrick Jensen and Lierre Keith are acting as firebrands to draw attention away from other radicals and to start creating the culture of resistance that is necessary for a real transformative environmentalist movement. While any response to the latter clause is speculative, the former is demonstrably false. That is, there is zero interest by any repressive government agency in Lierre Keith or Derrick Jensen; there are zero mentions of Deep Green Resistance in any study of environmental terrorism or potential environmental terrorism, in spite of the fact that wholesale government repression against environmentalism, even tepid liberal forms of environmentalism,²⁰ is in full swing. Keith and Jensen continue to publish books (and occasionally call the cops on other activists) without any observable repression targeting them. If their leadership is important it is certainly not important because it draws attention away from other activists.

The centerpiece of *DGR*’s insistence on the importance of leaders is that leadership is a necessary component of an effective organization. This is predicated on a selective reading of the revolutionary canon

20 Cf. Will Potter, *Green is the New Red* for more on the contemporary Green Scare and repressive legal measures set up against environmentalism worldwide.

(DGR is interested in groups that have centralized leadership and are outright dismissive of groups that don't, regardless of their actual impact) and occasionally a baffling insistence on something contrary to known history, such as their belief that Anarchists lost the Spanish Civil War because Durutti died, rather than a complex host of factors. Thus, in a somewhat transparent jab at contemporary anarchists, DGR argues that "a wholesale rejection of leadership means a movement will be stuck at a level of ineffective small groups. It may feel radical but it will change nothing."^{xxxv} However, contrary to the assertions of DGR, the government is most worried about radical environmental groups eschewing leadership because of how difficult that makes them to track. Counter-terrorist publications by the United States government stress that:

Radical environmental groups like ALF and ELF have adopted a *leaderless resistance* model, in which autonomous subgroups of trusted confidants form cells for the purpose of carrying out illicit actions based on a set of guiding principles. New recruits are warned not to join existing cells, but rather to start their own cells with trusted associates. Regional and national press offices, which claim no official affiliation with the individual cells, post communiqués from the cells. The lack of a structured hierarchy and clearly identifiable leaders makes it difficult for law enforcement officials to infiltrate the groups. The leaderless structure also guards against the type of ideological fracturing that often plagued earlier radical environmentalist groups like Earth First!. **The net result is an amorphous organizational structure of loosely bound illicit actors who are able to persist over time and across vast geographic areas, posing tremendous challenges to the law enforcement community at the federal, state, and local levels.**^{xxxvi}

Because these groups are not tied to a figurehead and because

a complete separation is achieved between the underground and aboveground portions of ALF/ELF (which were more news clearinghouses with an ideological bent than a movement as envisioned by DGR), there is great difficulty in actually stopping them because (from *DGR's* reading) there are no leaders to kill to cripple the movement. Additionally, while *DGR* is enamored with the idea of institutional learning, where the parent aboveground organizations teach the theory, tactics and revolutionary zeal that makes for an effective organization, the assessment by the government's counterterrorist experts of ELF's "the Family" cell (who were arrested in Operation Backfire) is fairly impressed with their ability to simplify most of their methods to maximize their effectiveness. According to them the "group's tactics can be characterized as 'low tech' (requiring very little technical expertise to execute), effective against the selected targets in most cases, using readily available and inexpensive materials, requiring very little logistical support (e.g. to construct devices), easily taught and learned, easily rehearsed, and producing a significant visual impact (scorched buildings and burning flames guaranteed news coverage)."^{xxxvii} *DGR* could, perhaps rightly, object that the ELF attacks never stopped industrial civilization; however, it is undeniable that ELF/ALF provide a model that is easy to emulate, nets fairly consistent results, and provides significant logistical challenges to government agencies to make an arrest.

For *DGR* centralized leadership is imperative because the showpiece of their argument (Decisive Ecological Warfare) requires an organization capable of gathering a fairly broad cross section of the environmentalist movement and to set it on a four step plan to eliminate industrial society. These four phases will be covered briefly below before delving more deeply into the fourth (decisive) phase.

- Phase 1 is where “resisters focus on organizing themselves into networks and building cultures of resistance to sustain those networks. Many sympathizers or potential recruits are unfamiliar with serious resistance strategy and action, so efforts are taken to spread that information. But key in this phase is actually forming the above- and underground organizations (or at least nuclei) that will carry out organizational recruitment and decisive action.”^{xxxviii} This is both the stage which DGR views itself as occupying and a stage that is fairly uncontroversial (other than their analysis of ecological change, their divisiveness as an organization, and their authoritarian leadership). Essentially, Phase 1 is about gathering the necessary forces to execute the later stages.
- Phase 2 is where differentiated roles for the aboveground and underground portions of the movement begin to take shape. As stated above the aboveground organization(s) are, in theory, able to push a narrative of support, or at least tacit approval, for direct actions taken by the underground. Perplexingly, this is a long-existing trend in radical environmentalism (specifically the distribution of communiques from direct action attacks supportively), and in the entire history of this tactic there has not been much evidence that doing so changes public opinion one iota. Additionally, the aboveground organization(s) can begin confederating with other radical organizations to build a wider network to draw on in future conflicts and to prepare non-activists for the shocks of reduced availability of electrical power and other luxuries as the ecological conflict steps up. They also “plan strategically themselves, engaging in persistent planned campaigns instead of reactive or crisis-to-crisis organizing.”^{xxxix} Underground organizations are somewhat limited in their (projected) utility at this point as for “the most part, the required underground networks and skills do not yet exist to take on multiple larger targets. Resisters may go after

particularly egregious targets-coal-fired power plants or exploitative banks.”^{xi} Phase 2 is theoretically the point at which direct action starts mobilizing from their projected organization(s) and where broad based organizing begins to pay off because (the theoretical) DGR is able to draw on so many supporters across a broad range of actions.

- Phase 3 is centered on underground groups beginning to engage in systems disruption; which is defined in terms of “identifying key points and bottlenecks in the adversary’s systems (electrical, transport, financial, and so on) and engaging them to collapse those systems or reduce their functionality,” while accepting that this disruption is not reducible to a single action because “industrial systems are big... but they are sprawling rather than monolithic. Repairs are attempted. The resistance members understand that. Effective systems disruption requires planning for continued and coordinated actions over time.”^{xii} The net gain of systems disruption is that the aboveground groups are able to begin filling the power void created by these attacks with increasingly localized and autonomous community building along with selective democratic involvement to curtail the powers of the government to unleash oppression.
- Phase 4 is essentially an amplified version of Phase 3, where instead of disrupting systems and attempting to reduce the human impact (that is collateral damage and casualties), the aim is to completely eradicate the functionality of certain systems without concern for human impact because of the looming threat of global warming. While all 4 phases are considered separately, technically the division between them is somewhat academic, as McBay admits that some individuals will always, because of their particular skill sets or commitments, be engaged in Phase 1 broad based recruiting and movement building to replace militants lost to attrition.

It is worth noting that the desirability of this project is predicated on an apocalyptic reading of resistance in the United States. The scenarios that *DGR* use to build the case for this methodology ostensibly argue that there is no organizing going on against contemporary environmental horror (excluding groups that they patronizingly state simply lack the power to challenge things, such as indigenous land rights movements, or are hopelessly inept in their tactical action like ELF/ALF). From there they project an existing movement that can minimize the brunt of ecological damage but is unable to completely halt industrial production and lacks a single minded devotion to wrecking industrial processes. *DGR* is then able to propose that Decisive Ecological Warfare is truly the best possible solution for repairing the ecological damage caused by industrial culture (by moving from focusing on the worst targets to the worst processes to stopping all industrial projects) while minimizing the impact on humans (by gradually working towards autonomy and self-sufficiency). While on paper these ideas seem workable, they are built on a number of fallacious assumptions; firstly, that the government and its attendant forces will not “harden” to defend vulnerable parts of industrial society when attacks on them begin having real effects, and secondly that such an unwieldy organization as *DGR*’s proposed confederation (spearheaded by *DGR* itself) can enact the security culture necessary to evade infiltration by informants and remain robust in the face of oppression. To illustrate this, I will turn to the conclusion of *DGR* where Lierre Keith expands upon a narrative of *DGR* rising to prominence and contrast it with both the reality of their organization and the material reality of conflict.

**A RELIGIOUS CONCEPTION OF ACTIVISM WITH AN APOCALYPSE
CULT IDEOLOGY**

The conclusion to *DGR* devolves into Lierre Keith's eco-war science fiction, which is instructive for looking at the deeply messianic nature of the processes discussed in *DGR*. While there are several false premises underlying *DGR*'s assumptions about potential trajectories of the dying days of industrial culture, their messianic and spiritual undertones are most prominent when the document discusses what the rise of *DGR* will look like. After outlining the phases of the strategy of Decisive Ecological Warfare, Keith provides a narrative structure as to how that might play out (a narrative that is fundamentally optimistic, I might add) starting on page 495 and comprising much of the end of the book. Despite opening with a meditation on spreading resistance through environmental evangelism, Keith is insistent that "DGR is not secular millenarianism."^{xlii} Nonetheless, what follows is a poetic spread of allegedly non-symbolic direct action that is, however it is phrased, highly symbolic. As Keith states:

In our story, the first direct hit to industrial infrastructure is likely to be something more pragmatic and less daring, like the electric grid. Our actionists have planned well. Remember the four criteria for target selection: the grid is accessible, vulnerable, and critical and while it is recuperable, the abundance of the first three criteria could potentially make that recuperability more theoretical than practical.

The underground networks can hit a few nodes at once and the unconnected affinity groups, well versed in DEW and the *DGR* grand strategy, can follow up on vulnerable targets to which they have access. The first *DGR* blackout could last days or even weeks.^{xliii}

Because this theoretical attack is a jumping off point for the rapid

growth of the (theoretical) DGR and their accelerated recruitment to dispersed attacks across the country, it is worth delving into some of its problematic assumptions. Firstly, success is measured in environmental impact being reduced. Although human impact is (theoretically) addressed, the idea that a grid failure would save the environment (or at least reduce the rate at which it is being destroyed) with no negative impact is hopelessly optimistic. Apparently, in this vision, there is no one relying on critical services (such as life support) who dies because of the grid winking out, or auto accidents, rioting, food shortages in inner cities, etc. These are completely brushed aside in the belief people will come together and enjoy the respite from industrial capitalism. There is some basis for this, such as some of the positive organizing that went on after Katrina in New Orleans, but there is also the reactionary blowback, which also occurred in New Orleans post-Katrina.²¹ While the impact is certainly dependent on where the grid goes down (e.g. if the southwest lost the grid in the middle of summer or if the northeast lost the grid in the middle of winter) the possibility of such an impact is brushed aside by the necessity of immediate action against an industrial system that is immediately killing the planet. Keith also notes that large environmental groups and corporations (but somehow not the government) will, naturally, be upset (to slightly understate the case), and condemn the organization responsible. She then speculates that the impact of such an action would breed imitators (taking on tar sands extraction in her vision) and indigenous groups would begin flocking to join DGR's crusade (to throw in a tacky white savior narrative).

As the conflict between DGR and industrial civilization deepens, DGR as a manual begins to be translated and distributed worldwide sparking sympathy movements, at least in Lierre Keith's vision. This is imperative because "DGR requires a trail of solidarity, a trail that is

21 A good rundown is available in *Floodlines* by Jordan Flaherty

build up into a protective barrier, an unbreachable line of determination against industrial assault. Our actionists draw that line around every rainforest and every last stand of old growth, and they build that barrier with transfers of funds and training and materiel”^{xliv} Part of this is because DGR, despite by Keith’s own estimation being widely hated, requires a significant and continually increasing number of dispersed activists, as their strategy involves hitting a huge variety of targets (power grids, dams, industrial logging, industrial fishing, industrial agriculture, etc.) all of which have very specific processes and geographically dispersed bases. In a corollary process, Keith envisions young people abandoning cities to become self-sufficient farmers and begin repairing the environment through permaculture. Around page 512, Keith resumes her narrative of actionists taking up the DGR banner, now worldwide, and sympathy attacks that echo those in the United States actions of DGR spring up across the globe as DGR becomes committed to continually crashing the grid and halting industrial operations. Among the widening circle of attacks (which destabilizes the power grid for the United States), aboveground organizations are assumed to begin buying land and starting transition towns “based on direct democracy, human rights, feminism, steady state economies” while also winning local office and heading state secessionist movements.^{xlv} While this strange mix of aboveground and underground action proliferates, and somehow ignores that corporations may stage something in response to secessionists outlawing corporations or that the federal government may intervene when a group that is openly supportive of “terrorist” actions that are crashing the national power grid starts buying up the Mississippi Delta, or that the federal government in the interests of corporations may activate state national guards or call a state of emergency and freeze individuals movement. Of course there is also blasé apocalyptic imagery such as the idea that there “are tracts of old-growth forest now fertilized by the blood of your friends, but the

trees still stand.”²² Naturally, despite the attention paid to this section, it remains simply theoretical bluster; DGR has in the 3 years since the publication of *DGR* accomplished zero acts of direct action²² and remains in Phase 1 as an aboveground group. While DGR theoretically strictly separates itself from criminal activity, there seems to be little interest by direct action radicals to act in solidarity with their organization. Part of this is because despite the bluster about security culture,²³ the fact that the de facto heads of the organization (Jensen and Keith) have frequently called the cops on other activists does not help. Ultimately, many of the internal contradictions of *DGR* come out in their narrative of what their resistance will look like. How can their aboveground organization prepare for the post-industrial world without accepting that industrialization is also part of the economy (which remains neutral in their eyes) or the government (which they seem to think can be influenced)? How is an organization so committed to primitivism so ignorant of critiques of primitivism that have been circulating since the late 80s? How is industrial culture somehow perfectly static and always attackable even in the midst of a (projected) almost total war that still allows the aboveground organizations to engage in reclamation projects? Etc. Ultimately, the failures of *DGR/DGR* metastasize to every level of the organizational principles, the metaphysics, the tactics, the planning, etc. There is no way to cleanly separate any particular part of the organization to be held up as a useful tool because every single part of it is interconnected with the abhorrent personalities of Lierre Keith and Derrick Jensen and the authoritarianism and messianic nature of the entire project.

22 <http://deepgreenresistance.org/en/what-we-do/deep-green-resistance-campaigns>

23 <http://deepgreenresistance.org/en/get-involved/security-culture>

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- i "<http://www.anarchistnews.org/content/deep-green-resistance-book-review>" for a sort of clearing house of anarchist critiques

- ii "<http://earthfirstjournal.org/newswire/2013/05/15/deep-green-transphobia/>" explains Earth First! Newswire's decision to drop them and links to quite a few of the criticisms of Lierre Keith & Derrick Jensen's transphobia

- iii DGR, 11

- iv Ibid

- v Ibid, 12

- vi Ibid, 194

- vii Ibid, 213

- viii Ibid, 494

- ix Ibid, 23

- x Ibid, 497

- xi Harris, Marvin. *Cows, Pigs, Wars and Witches: The Riddles of Culture*, 86

- xii DGR, 495

- xiii Ibid, 479
- xiv Chaz Bufe, "Listen Anarchist"
- xv DGR, 442
- xvi Ibid
- xvii Ibid, 84
- xviii Ibid, 347
- xix Ibid, 348
- xx Ibid, 391
- xxi Ibid, 416
- xxii Ibid, 418
- xxiii National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism. "Countering Eco-Terrorism in the United States The Case of 'Operation Backfire' : Final Report to the Science & technology Directorate, U.S. Department of Homeland Security," September 2012, 2 accessed at: http://www.start.umd.edu/pubs/START_EffectivenessofLECountermeasuresOperationBackfire_Sept2012.pdf
- xxiv Ibid, 15 & 11

- xxv *DGR*, 411-412; emphasis my own
- xxvi A Murder of Crows, "Fire at Midnight, Destruction at Dawn: Sabotage and Social War"
- xxvii *Ibid*
- xxviii *DGR*, 400
- xxix *Ibid*, 189
- xxx *Ibid*, 432
- xxxi *Ibid*, 442
- xxxii *Ibid*, 174-175
- xxxiii *Ibid*, 175
- xxxiv *Ibid*, 421
- xxxv *Ibid*, 175
- xxxvi *START*, 12
- xxxvii *Ibid*, 20
- xxxviii *DGR*, 447

xxxix Ibid, 450

xl Ibid, 448

xli Ibid, 451

xlii Ibid, 496

xliii Ibid, 503

xliv Ibid, 506

xlv Ibid, 514

xlvi Ibid, 515

A LIFE OF LIES

*The Tao that can be spoken is not the eternal Tao
The name that can be named is not the eternal name
The nameless is the origin of Heaven and Earth
The named is the mother of myriad things
Thus, constantly without desire, one observes its essence
Constantly with desire, one observes its manifestations
These two emerge together but differ in name
The unity is said to be the mystery
Mystery of mysteries, the door to all wonders*

- Tao Te Ching

I. A LIFE OF LIES

All we have are the stories we tell. These are the order we bring to the cascade of impressions made by our senses, themselves containing nothing beyond the raw facts of their own existence. I saw, I heard, I felt, but none of these sights, sounds, or feelings mean anything on their own. Each is set into relation with others accompanying it which together with the reflexive experiences they trigger, like memories and emotions, form a correlative tableau reaching intermittently into our pasts. From these

we mark out objects, interpret causes, and seize upon expectations. In this way we weave the whole rich narrative of our lives, telling stories of triumph over adversity, unbreakable friendships, and shameful betrayals. Yet we do all of this without ever reaching beyond ourselves, nor could we: our senses mediate every relation between our cognition and the world that lays beyond it. Without taking the metaphysically solipsist position that there is literally nothing on the other side of our experiences, that our subjective experience is the sole thing that exists, we may nonetheless understand that this mediation by our senses denies each of us unadulterated access to pure knowledge of any sort of external reality. We each find ourselves alone in a void peopled only by our fictions, guided by the light of truths of our own device. The quest for truth and the terrible realization of its impossibility has tormented western philosophers for millennia. Here, though, we are not interested in filling the place where Truth should stand, but in making use of its absence.

Whatever the stories we each tell about ourselves, we tell many more about the people with whom we populate them. If mediation by our senses pollutes our access to knowledge, the lack of a particular sort of sense entirely is an even greater barrier. This is the situation which confronts us in other individuals, the gap which divides each of us cognitively from an external reality performs a doubled role in also dividing each of us from all others. For lack of the ability to directly experience the reality of another person's inner being, we are left with the task of making clumsy inferences from imperfect information about piecemeal encounters with their individual ways of being. For each of us, all others are constellations of illuminating experiences spanning a gulf into which we pour stories about them. In this way, knowing another is a matter of interpretation, not revelation, nor is it one sided, as we each show ourselves to be also performers, even if unconscious ones, whenever we take action to shape

the stories others have for us. This holds as much for tokens of affection or acts of solidarity as for conformance to a gender and the keeping of secrets. Even for those who would be believed in speaking their truths it is not enough to be merely honest but also credible and sincere. If that truth is uncomfortable, listeners will take those who are sincere but incredible as mad and the credible but insincere as comedians. Of course, an individual might consciously work to be perceived as any of the three such as suits their interests, and it is for this reason no accident that those who would speak uncomfortable truths with impunity often do so in the form of jokes. But truth-speaker, madman, and comedian are only roles describing the place one has in a narrative being woven by another while the real individual laying beneath the role remains absent from the story. Just as a mass passing through the depths of space may often be known only by the way its presence bends light and perturbs orbits, the thing itself a purely theoretical construction, we too are never for another what we are for ourselves. It is for this reason that even deliberate performances cannot be reduced to mere lies, and we are at our most deceptive when we are the most honest.

To properly understand the singularity of another individual as fundamentally removed from our realities is to fully embrace the disconcerting notion that what we call a person is only an illusion which we assemble ourselves from whatever experiences we can pull together under the umbrella of an identification. This foundational act of identification severs a discrete region of experiences from their surroundings and, erecting a barrier around them, says “these things are one and the same.” However, those experiences associated together as a person are generally only those elements most proximally relatable as a singularity in motion. Though it can be argued that a person is only and exactly the flesh of a real, human body this assessment falters with the radical difference between common treatments of living bodies and

corpses, or the way that those close to a dementia patient sometimes react as though the person themselves were slipping away leaving the body intact. Even the belief in demonic possession strikes upon this insight, recognizing in the new behaviors the presence of a wholly other person. The person then, as such, is just a conceptual tool for modeling dynamic space, finding its limit in both the capacity of the observer to experience another and the mechanical limits of their cognition to make use of those experiences. These limitations drive the treatment of the severed region of personhood, of faces, clothing, voices, and shared histories, as exclusive of all other elements, partaking of a tendency, especially in Western modes of thought, to focus on the Things that we Do, the colorful objects and novel events we perceive as the central features of lived experience, while ascribing insignificance to the hundred-thousand details surrounding and permeating them, and into which they are causally embedded. However, that the National Security Administration (NSA) has the ability to construct detailed analyses of individual behavior from just circumstantial information about emails and phone calls should make it clear that even the most seemingly insignificant things are important in aggregate. While the sheer scope of the NSA's capabilities are certainly reliant upon massive technological infrastructure, the fundamental elements constituting those capacities are not so marvelous: being privy to more of the insignificant details of our lives and being invested in their correlation. These elements are equally possessed by the people who comprise our day to day lives, who make up for their lack of powerful data mining utilities with their immediate access to our individual ways of being. Additionally, while the power of the NSA's data-mining technology is mostly in its ability to reconstruct a time-line after the fact, or at least after an individual has been upgraded to a target, the people in our lives tend toward a much more proactive interest. Relationships change, friends become enemies, the strong become weak, and what once

was benign can become malignant: But once knowledge is let loose into the world, it is exceptionally difficult to contain.

While anyone might benefit from taking an active hand in shaping the informational landscape into which sociality and technology embeds them, doing so is a much more practical matter for those who would maintain a hostility toward law. As regards this, we'd like to begin what we hope becomes a conversation about what it might mean to live another sort of life, one in which absolutely everything matters. What follows are not principles of lofty theory or the elaboration of an abstract strategy, but a first foray into articulating the everyday as always significant.

*The spots of the leopard are the sunlight in the glade; pursue thou the deer
stealthily at thy pleasure.*

*The dappling of the deer is the sunlight in the glade; concealed from the leopard
do thou feed at thy pleasure.*

*Resemble all that surroundeth thee; yet be Thyself—and take thy pleasure
among the living.*

This is that which is written—Lurk!—in The Book of The Law.

- Aleister Crowley, from The Book of Lies

II. BUILDING ON SERIOUS GROUND

Law does not confront the individual. It is a chimera whose myth allows a great multitude of disparate, in-cohesive, and sometimes mutually exclusive phenomena to be confused as a single functioning whole. Its material manifestation is dependent upon individuals to

inscribe law into the phenomenal world in which we live. It goes without saying that those who are hostile to law make it a practice to secure themselves against the threat posed by its material manifestation, which most visibly takes the form of the police. However, as with the lion's head of the mythic chimera whose roar distracts from its serpent fanged tail, the nature of the threat posed by the police is mostly misleading. The portrayal of police exploits in the news, reality television shows, and the sea of procedural dramas broadly reduces policing to the playing out of a binary opposition between law enforcers and law breakers. Similarly, the understanding we are encouraged to infer from the common enough image of armored police massed in a shield wall facing off against crowds of protesters is one of the police as an essentially military organization tasked with quelling unrest. These images are traps ready to ensnare us in a discourse of conflict wherein we are encouraged to define ourselves in relation to the police as nemeses, either by performing in accordance with the role of the upright Citizen or by seeing ourselves as those whom the police will hunt and inevitably capture, that is as Criminals.

Cursory examination should make it clear that the distinction between these things is not one of essential natures, nor a simple behavioral matter of adherence to, or violation of, the law. Individuals break the law as a normal matter of course in their day to day lives, in part because of the expectable evaluation of the relative obstruction posed by a particular statute against the perceived significance of ignoring it, and in part because of a general inability to navigate the legal code and its frequently over-broad, vague, or contradictory specifications. Yet we are broadly disinclined to perceive ourselves as criminals, perhaps because the modern conception of the criminal as an 'enemy of society' cannot be readily reconciled with the sense of social entanglement we nonetheless retain even as we act contrary to the law. A criminal is beyond society, yet even ascetics are hard pressed to remove themselves from one community

without simply establishing themselves in another, so something more is needed than mere contrariness to law to establish one as a criminal. This is precisely the function of policing which discretionarily marks out individuals for punishment in the form of imprisonment. While fines have a number of interesting properties beyond their gross function as revenue streams, it is through imprisonment that the political fiction of the criminal is given material substance by removing an individual geographically and bureaucratically beyond the reach of their people. In this way, the police become the measure for criminality through their actual enforcement practices, as ratified by the courts, which provide both legitimacy and a venue in which for the social figure of the criminal to be constructed through prosecution. In so far as upright citizenship is that which is exclusive of criminality, and imprisonment is the material realization of the criminals removal from sociality, we may understand the upright citizen as that individual which acts *such as to not be selected for imprisonment*. The material process of policing by this means effectively establishes the constitution of the *model citizen*, and while it should not be mistaken as over-determining all social mores and ways of being it does limit their breadth: “Every actual democracy rests on the principle that not only are equals equal but unequals will not be treated equally. Democracy requires, therefore, first homogeneity and second—if the need arises—elimination or eradication of heterogeneity.” (Schmitt 1926) Moreover, the material process of policing must be performed by actual entities, who bring with them all of the limits and biases of their cognitions, and whose individual discretion entirely determines occasions of enforcement, meaning that what is really enforced is not so much a body of written law as a *mosaic of normalcy*.

The first trap in taking the police as nemeses is one ostensibly of design, which would lead us to take the inescapability of the police for granted and thus perform always in accordance with the role

of the upright citizen, ignoring the law only where it is normal to do so. However, those hostile to law risk falling prey to a second trap in mistaking the police for their nemeses at all. The form this trap takes is in subjectivizing the police as an enemy, that is as an ontological entity which may be fought, outwitted, evaded, or otherwise over which victory may be claimed. Certainly individuals who are police may be engaged in such a fashion, but the organizations into which they are arranged, though they are conceivable as assemblages of individual police, do not express those capacities of their component individuals. Rather, policing is an essentially bureaucratic operation in which police themselves are more or less well armed functionaries. Policing comes into conflict with individuals through a process of establishing and maintaining particular norms that is accomplished without ever necessitating a conception of the individual as a thing which opposes it, but only as a body which *resists* it. For the police, the individual is always *merely* the incarnation of an abstract category and the bulk of on the ground policing is a matter of identifying, then responding, to these classifications. Because of this most evasion of the law is not done through outwitting and outmaneuvering police pursuit, but by navigating the mostly unspoken rules of an informal bureaucracy. There are striking similarities between being stopped by the police on the street and sitting across from the loan officer at a bank in that both are endeavoring to take our measure, sort us as a risk, and weigh the relative benefit or inconvenience of taking action regarding us. Beyond all this, to think the police as one's enemy is to take them for an entity that may be fought, yet most street fights are short, competition fights lasting more than a few minutes are grueling affairs, and even warfare is only occasionally punctuated by combat. By comparison, policing is a continuous enterprise which is always happening *somewhere*, always processing information, always working through identified *problems*, whose component individuals

work in shifts, who are each entirely replaceable, and for whom every citizen is a potential ally. Whereas, for us, we are broadly constrained in the reach of our actions, in the volume of information which we may meaningfully engage, in the scope of our attention to any given thing, in that we must sleep, cannot be replaced, and are surrounded by any number of others who may eventually betray us. Between these two, the police and our selves, there is no parity of being.

Caught in narratives wherein the police are cast as central antagonists, those hostile to law nonetheless endeavor to secure themselves against its manifestation. Toward this end a variety of protections have been formulated, appearing singly or quilted into various examples of “security culture”, but among these methods we find repeated two serious mistakes: over-concern for truth and the confusion of images for essences.

We make the first mistake when, prior to implementing a security measure, we attempt to reach beyond the available facts to achieve certainty in our understanding of the situation. This often centers around the answers to such questions as whether the police are interested in us, whether we are presently being observed, what the police are capable of doing, and whether this or that individual can be trusted. Properly resolving these questions requires access to specific knowledge regarding real-time police activity, their competencies and technological capacities, and the troubling matter of a putatively trustworthy individual’s future behavior. This returns us to a situation in which our inability to directly experience an individual’s way of being, including in this case the police as a total material phenomenon, forces us to make inferences from imperfect information drawn from past encounters with them. A void yawns between the data points of this constellation ready for us to fill it with *whatever works*, with whatever belief regarding our situation is sufficiently plausible, comfortable, and convenient to be accepted, iconically heralded by the words, “It will be okay.” Where these beliefs

go unpunished by circumstance they rapidly become entrenched as fact, perhaps marked by the argument, "But it was okay last time." Our interest in security must compete with all our other interests in order to be manifested in our actions, but the effort and inconvenience to which security measures are prone makes them ripe for mystification by those other interests, for which the gaps in our knowledge serve as excellent levers. Furthermore, collaborative efforts can descend through spirals of mutual affirmation, indolence, and expediciencies until the effort to secure ourselves against law becomes the simulation of security practices merely for their social cachet. While sub-optimal practices elsewhere can be culled through experience, where law threatens us mistakes are a luxury. As described in a manual on crime scene investigation, "Criminals ... who spend their days on the wrong side of the law, or commit any other crimes, must remember this: a criminal has to get away with every crime he or she commits. However, to get criminals off the street and put them behind bars, the police only have to catch a criminal once." (Evans 2009) However, overcoming these failings is not a matter of changing security practices themselves, but of changing what it is we are securing within.

We make the second mistake when we treat our experiences of an individual as representing that individual's essential nature. The experiences we have of a singularity in motion unified under the convenient fiction of a "person" are dispersed in time as well as in space, creating the appearance of a continuity related through a *trajectory* along the course of which future behaviors will manifest. However, our ways of being are not separate from the situations, environments, and other ways of being which surround, construct, and reinforce them, meaning that the quality of behavioral forecasts is constrained by the commutability of the predicating experiences to actual future conditions. This most seriously confronts us where a future situation is radically different from any experience we've had of that individual, thereby placing the

entire basis for our trust in question. We may have a depth of intimate experience with an individual which leads us to see them, or perhaps ourselves, as heroic and cunning, or zealously committed to a vision, but these experiences are contingent on the situations in which they formed. Could they be heroic without our support? Can they maintain their cunning while inebriated? Will their zeal survive a change in passions, or the enticement of romance? Especially consider that the police are specifically trained to construct situations that undermine obduracy and build willingness to cooperate. The illusion of continuity makes it difficult, as well as unpleasant, for us to see in our friends, lovers, and comrades the wretched or incompetent individuals they may one day be, yet when we place trust in an individual we place trust in these future individuals as well. Many have run afoul of the police after being betrayed by a former lover or a co-conspirator who, perhaps literally, knew where the bodies were buried. Similarly, our own sense of self mastery obscures from us the myriad ways in which we may fail, or betray, ourselves in the future. It can seem daunting to be faced with taking everyone in whom we might place trust, even ourselves, as also an enemy against whom we must secure ourselves, but this does not require that we not trust, only that we change what it is we are trusting.

We are forced to live out our lives deep in the midst of law, which surrounds us as a hostile territory filled with hazardous terrain. For us, there are no safe spaces, only more or less secure dens in which we may find temporary rest. Furthermore, for lack of the capacity to oppose the police as a fellow institution, or even good intelligence and reliable allies, yet unable to simply escape beyond their reach, though we do not take the police as enemies to be fought, we nonetheless take them as a threat to be managed.

*He, the wretch, who thus set thee malign in my meadow,
Felon traitor of wood, arboretal assassin,*

*With remorseless design coming down unawares
On the head of an innocent master like me.*

Who can hope to be safe? Who sufficiently cautious?

Guard himself as he may, every moment's an ambush.

*Thus the sailor of Carthage alarmed at a squall
In the Euxine, may find his least danger at sea.*

- The Roman poet Horace,
after being nearly crushed by a falling tree

III. EVERYTHING IS TRUE, NOTHING IS PERMITTED

Popular responses to the danger of law enforcement generally take the form of either passively removing the law from consideration through defining one's actions as insignificant, as being not among the events of interest to the authorities, or else in the institution of a system of precautions for one's extralegal activities in the form of security mindedness. We do not think these approaches are necessarily without merit, but they both rely on one to distinguish harmful from benign activity on a case by case basis, navigating a course between limited sense data, personal knowledge, varying states of mind (or sobriety), and awareness of the real activities of law enforcement as it pertains to one's life. This is a reflexive approach in which *harm* is *avoided*. For

us, maintaining a dedicated hostility to law which is lived out in the normal course of our lives means that law also threatens us with its manifestation within the scope of our daily routines. The omnipresence of this threat denies us the ability to simply partition our lives into realms which are either dangerous or safe. In this way, our situation parallels that of any individual who must professionally operate under dangerous circumstances.

The threat to life and limb posed by an active construction site, with its whirring blades and perilous heights, has enough similarities to our own circumstances, with its potential for betrayals and the high price of even momentary failures of discipline, for us to think that the approach to pro-actively managing threats which works for the builder will also yield results for us, regardless of the nature and scope of our hostility to law. Threat management operates through a counter-factual closure of the distinction between harmful and benign situations, looking for future harm where no harm yet exists, treating that future harm as fully real in the present, and taking action against it. A safety minded carpenter might when presented with a board with exposed nails refuse utterly the reasoning that as they are both skillful and aware of the nails they may safely avoid an accident, rather by assuming they *will* be harmed and by hammering the nails flat, they render that assumed harm impossible. Comparably, when faced with the possibility of betrayal, we might refuse utterly to believe that we can navigate the distinction between the trustworthy and the untrustworthy, instead treating each of our confidants as already police informants in the present, limiting the means and content of our communication as befits this. The alternative we are putting forward is that we are always already under surveillance and, impossibly, already caught. By accepting these falsities we bring new meaning to the myriad things which surround us.

Fortunately, it is not necessary for us to develop an entirely new

philosophy of security. The economic cost of injury and death in dangerous occupations from delays, fines, civil suits, and the loss of expensive training and expertise has lead, through loss aversion at an industrial scale, to efforts to comprehensively analyze threats to life and limb, and detail approaches to securing individuals against them. Each of our situations is unique and no treatise on security strategy can be sufficiently detailed to encompass the materiality of those situations, leaving us to develop our own approaches in the context of the terrain we each actually occupy. However, this is also the case in industry where problems of safety manifest in fashions more or less unique to each site of work. This inability to accomplish a single, total itemization of safety procedures necessitated conceptual tools for adapting to conditions in the field, an example of which is found in what is termed the *hierarchy of hazard controls*. This framework classifies all approaches to safety into five categories, ordered by decreasing effectiveness, through which every analysis of safety must proceed with lower tier approaches being accepted only once it is determined that a higher order approach is untenable: *elimination, substitution, engineered controls, administrative controls, and personal protective equipment*. These categories do require some interpretation to be understood in the context of the sort of dangers which confront us, but once understood we think they are eminently applicable to our own problems of security.

The single most effective approach to security threats, and the most difficult to implement, is to eliminate their possibility entirely. In this approach, we examine the need of taking a particular sort of dangerous action or allowing a certain dangerous situation to continue and then question the necessity of that thing, eliminating it entirely where it is unnecessary. Where a conversation's topic is incriminating, we might question the need to have it at all. Do we need what we are getting out of this particular sabotage? Simply put, a confidence not given cannot

be betrayed and a tenuous situation not suffered cannot implode disastrously. Where something is deemed necessary, or beyond our power to remove, as may be the case with the threat posed by the police themselves, we may be unable to eliminate it. Nonetheless, elimination is without exception the place from which we begin and only after a thing's necessity is established do we attempt to work around its existence.

Where an activity or situation is unavoidable, the next most effective approach is to substitute its dangerous elements for ones which are not dangerous. To return to the example of incriminating conversations, where one is necessary we might be able to substitute the incriminating content for content which is not. In the case of sabotage, there may be other potential targets which equally well serve our need, as established during the elimination phase of our considerations, the substitution for which might exclude some of the dangers surrounding an attack on the original target. Where one has illegally seized a building, ones obvious use of the building may constitute a dangerous activity in itself, the attention drawing elements of which might be substitutable for more covert approaches. However, it is important to this approach that the substitution not produce new threats of its own. In the case of an incriminating conversation, it must also be considered whether the inability to speak candidly as to one of its elements endangers us through lack of clarity or the creation of technical ignorance, leaving us unable to substitute out all incriminating elements. Similarly, the threat of betrayal might tempt us to keep our activities solitary, but depending on the particulars of those activities, the absence of those extra eyes, hands, cognitions, and competencies may well be far more immediately dangerous than a future betrayal.

After all substitutions have been performed, we may still be presented with a necessary situation or activity which endangers us, in which case we must attempt to manage whatever threat remains. Through engineered

controls we attempt to isolate individuals from threats. This isolation can be spatial, temporal, or even juridical but the core of the isolating approach is that it limits who may be harmed by the manifestation of a particular risk rather than seeking to prevent its original manifestation, and does so without the need for in the moment intervention. Any time we move our activities indoors, deep into the countryside, or simply down an unused alley, we engage this tier. Incriminating conversations can be isolated from the authorities through anonymizing software and cameras might be blocked or otherwise disabled. Similarly, through the construction of affinity groups we attempt to contain knowledge of our activities to only those we most know and trust, endeavoring to isolate ourselves from the threat posed by informants and traitors. This same approach equally endeavors to juridically isolate those outside our affinity groups from the risk posed by our actions through the establishment of plausible deniability. However, there are risks from which we cannot isolate ourselves, even our most trusted comrades may one day betray us, but where there is need we must sometimes proceed into direct contact with the things that threaten us. Doing so brings us into the least effective approaches which rely on individual competencies and performances to keep us from harm, and we only entertain their application after exhausting all higher order approaches.

Administrative controls are an effort to manage a threat by changing our behaviors. The use of training, posted signs, or security procedures all fall into this tier. Examples of procedures are taking separate paths to and from meetings, promises to maintain a wall of silence in the face of police inquiry, living a “cover life” so as to allay suspicion from our other activities, or moving conversations away from potentially “bugged” locations. We engage this tier when we attempt to select the time and place of sabotage such as to avoid the presence of police, cameras, and witnesses effectively isolating ourselves from the threat posed by each.

We also engage this tier when we rely on stealth to get us to a target, lies to allay suspicion from our actions, or technical knowledge to bypass a security system. Finally, posters endeavoring to dissuade contact with the police, “snitches get stitches” perhaps, also fall into this approach. The benefit of growing our own competencies and capacities, that is our own power, cannot be understated, and the historical success of stonewalling the police is noteworthy. However, administrative controls are only as good as are we, especially consider that one of the classic hallmarks of an aging, weathered carpenter being a missing finger or two. We should never rely on training alone to keep us safe.

The final approach, and our last line of defense, is personal protective equipment. Here, faced with a necessary danger from which we cannot further isolate ourselves, having done all we can to prepare ourselves through planning and training, we armor ourselves as best we can and proceed with what we hope are open eyes. Masks and disguising clothing fall into this category, though the “black block” strategy used sometimes by protesters or during massed vandalism is better understood as an administrative control, as does the use of encryption for our communications and data. This tier is notable for functioning only once all else has failed, once security has been breached, or once the police are already sifting through our belongings. Even so, personal protection is worthwhile as one more layer in a comprehensive approach to securing ourselves against law.

The overall perspective of the hierarchy of hazard controls may be understood as organizing approaches to contingency into three broad categories, ordered by decreasing effectiveness: negation, avoidance, and deflection. Negation prevents the manifestation of contingent futures, digging up their roots in the present thereby ensuring that no threat can sprout from them. Elimination and Substitution are both negational strategies. Avoidance seeks to prevent a contingent future from

manifesting such as to encompass us in its scope, that is the police may well make arrests, but hopefully we will not find ourselves also caught up. Engineered Controls and Administrative Controls are both avoidance strategies, with administration falling below engineering in effectiveness primarily because of its reliance on the in the moment competence of the individuals involved. Deflection seeks to shield us from the harm of a contingent future once it has already befallen us. Personal Protective Equipment functions through deflection, and suffers heavily as a strategy for reliance on our resources to provide adequately for it, the inadequacy of our opponent's resources to counter it, and its ability, even where all else is equal, to simply fail to function. In essence, this framework advocates for direct approaches to problems over those which are indirect, and anything else over mere hope that things will turn out in our favor.

All that said, there is always risk which remains unaddressed by even the most comprehensive security program, which is part and parcel of merely living let alone living a life poised in hostility to law. What we have presented here is only a finger pointing at the nebulous menagerie of problems brought on by the illusions which plague us. We do not think there is an escape from our illusions, but only the questionably useful admonition to *manage* them. For us, we are each already betrayed, already occupy our prison cell, and already rot in the ground. Nonetheless, we refuse to concede the power to determine the *details* of these things. Though we imagine that doom befalls us all, we want that it should be our doom.

*I cannot think the unthinkable, but I can think that
it is not impossible for the impossible to be.*

- Quentin Meillassoux

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SOME THOUGHTS ON THE LIMITS OF SURVEILLANCE

THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE NARRATIVE OF THE PANOPTIC

It has become almost fashionable to dismiss the existence of any political possibility of action, to posit that everything is determined through the use of force and the sheer breadth of its deployment, but this is a dangerous and partial vision. Largely this view is being drawn from experiences in partial confrontations, where resistance manifests in a place for a period of time, the Occupy camp or summit demonstration, combined with a completely disproportionate understanding of the capacity of police logistics to function and monitor movements through space. Born of limited confrontation, in which police force can be concentrated within a zone of conflict, and paranoia about surveillance apparatuses like the NSA, which seems to have unfortunately gotten worse since the Snowden leaks, the idea that the state is all seeing, completely functional in all space and invincible strategically¹ has begun take root, and has generated a passive sort of waiting². From this

- 1 This has been made much worse by the tendency among the radical and insurgent scene to listen to conspiracy theorists, who take dispersed pieces of information and fuse them with a series of paranoid assumptions born out of inflated senses of self importance and a complete lack of strategic understanding to generate a vision of malicious policing structures that exist to target one specifically within some supposedly global vision.
- 2 This passivity of waiting exists in contrast to an active form of waiting, a process of avoiding direct confrontation, but of working to create a terrain conducive to insurrection, both through infrastructural development and minor forms of subversion.

point of positing some form of absolute deployment within a context of endless capacity to maintain total deployment³ this argument then moves to a position of arguing that this situation could never be impacted through any action, that this dynamic cannot change, as if action, any action, does not cause a change in the dynamics of security, an assumption that every asymmetric campaign undercuts. All around us we can see this hopelessness taking root, a hopelessness that tends to find currency with the collapse of “movements” that the naïve had ultimate hope in, in this case Occupy which was crushed through a coordinated security operation. Often this hopelessness is counterposed by an equally naïve tendency to hold out hope, rather than to examine the roots of failure, to continue with the same methods in the hope that a break through will occur, rather than to take a sober, realistic look at the actual materiality of the adversary. Interestingly, this dynamic of hope and hopelessness that infects radical movements tend to find a common core of analysis, an attempt to approach conflict conceptually, as a game of political rhetoric and ideas, rather than to come to terms with the materiality of conflict, the stakes and risks of fighting, the material deployments of conflict, the severity of repression and the limits of police capacity.

Through the medium of post-structuralism, and poor readings of Foucault, this concept of the all powerful state tends to concentrate around the concept of panoptic power, the ability of the state to see all action in all moments. But, this understanding of the Panopticon is

- 3 Total control not only means total deployment, but the maintenance of total deployment indefinitely. This would mean that not only would the streets be completely occupied, all moments watched and all actions repressed, but that this would be maintained into some indefinite future. The sheer logistical capacity this would take would be an impossibility, police and soldiers would have to be housed, fed, equipped, vehicles would require gasoline and so on. This was impossible to maintain in even a partial way in Iraq with 400,000 troops, with this number they physically covered very little space at any one moment; the partiality of coverage generated the space for insurgency to be possible, and the logistical toll of maintaining these operations almost ruptured US military force capacity

fundamentally misinformed, relying on a notion that the concept of the panopticon can be equated to actual surveillance, and that this forms the basis of mass surveillance initiatives, such as bulk metadata collection by the NSA. Foucault draws the concept of the Panopticon back to Jeremy Bentham, an 18th Century British utilitarian, and his designs for prison complexes. The design itself centers around a tall central guard tower, with wings of the prison emanating from this central site. The purpose of this design is to allow the guard in the tower to functionally see all activities of all prisoners simultaneously, but this generates an important and interesting difficulty. Clearly, it would be impossible for one or a handful of guards to watch all prisoners at the same time, so the design is based around an interesting and highly specific feature, the windows of the guard tower are opaque to the outside observer. As such, the structure of surveillance becomes based not on the actual ability to monitor, but rather on the possibility of surveillance; it is not that one is always being watched, but that one could be watched at any one point. The tint in the glass is meant to obscure the actual capacity of the gaze of the guard, if there is even a guard, with the assumption that the outside observer, in this case the prisoner, would have to assume that they could be under this gaze at any moment. In other words, the entire design functions through the deterrent force of possible surveillance, rather than the actual gathering of information. Not only does this fundamentally structure the Panopticon along the lines of what Foucault would go on to call biopower, the structure of power around the normativity of the body under possible gaze, but also around the hypothetical possibility of surveillance.

The central core of the functionality of the Panopticon, which was never actually built in its full form as a prison complex, has become a symbolically descriptive term for a structure of surveillance built around a transparency of surveillance, the generation of a sense in which

one knows, or has distinct reason to think, that they are or could be watched at any moment. The distinction to make here is that structures that can be termed panoptic are not based in the actual surveillance of subjects, rather the deterrent effect of presenting the possibility of surveillance. We do see elements of this in the structure of private, and to a lesser degree public, surveillance in the United States, specifically in the form of the retail surveillance system, which may be functional, which may actually film activities, but are based largely on the clear presence of countermeasures, anti-shoplifting signs, the open presence of “loss prevention” staff, magnetic tags, clearly visible cameras and so on. What has become interesting is that this structure tends to break down when force is not applied at the point when the deterrent effect breaks down, or when the deterrent effect is seen as such. This becomes clear with the prevalence of shoplifting, which conservative estimates equate to a \$13 billion⁴ loss each year; at the point in which it has become clear that anti-shoplifting measures are not as comprehensive as they attempt to present themselves as being the mythology dissipates and the practice proliferates (there are whole blogs discussing the problems with anti-shoplifting technologies and ways to avoid their functionality). Panoptic structures rely entirely on “self-policing” within a structure in which the definitions of acceptability are clearly defined, rather than on the actual gathering and use of information. The partiality of this approach is clear in the example of shoplifting, when the structure of deterrence breaks down, or when it becomes clear that no one is watching the cameras, the entire edifice collapses.

Outside of the retail establishment we are beginning to see this structure come to be relied on more and more in certain ways. Increasingly there has become a reliance on public surveillance cameras by police departments, specifically in “high crime” areas and areas where

4 <http://www.shopliftingprevention.org/TheIssue.htm>

tourism exists as an economic backbone. But, rather than the tendency to hide cameras, what we are seeing is a more panoptic structure, not only the tendency to make cameras more public, but the tendency to put flashing lights on them and to publicize their installation as widely as possible. Before anti-convention demonstrations we have witnessed this dynamic play itself out through the pre-demonstration media narrative, where the local police chief walks journalists around to the new camera locations, discusses how many have been installed around the city, then shows off their new command center, finally finishing with a warning to “out of town trouble makers”. The goal here is not primarily intelligence gathering, if that were the case then cameras would be hidden, although intelligence may result. The intent here is clear, this is an attempt to deter action. But, hiding behind this is a logistical mythology, one that we can clearly see when we take a look at actual intelligence gathering. For all the cameras that are installed, this footage means essentially nothing without the ability to identify targets, track targets and eliminate targets; in other words, this results in nothing but a possible deterrent effect in lieu of the capacity to actually operationalize this information, to make it into the operative information that structures an actual operation. The necessity to increase operational capacity exists in a direct relationship with the number of cameras that are installed; if there is only partial response then the mythology of total response, the basis of deterrence, evaporates, and the camera becomes nothing but an aesthetic feature, and something that, maybe, minor counter-measures have to be employed to avoid.

**FROM PANOPTIC STRUCTURES TO THE WEAPONIZATION OF
INFORMATION**

It is fundamentally important to differentiate this panoptic form of deterrence from actual intelligence gathering, which not only attempts to remain secret, but also attempts to weaponize information operationally. When we are speaking about actual intelligence gathering, entrapment operations, undercover work, signals intelligence and so on there is a very different goal in mind, the gathering and use of information through the maintenance of a certain clandestinity, through the ability to monitor without being able to be detected, and this is what we are seeing currently with organizations like the NSA. Fundamentally, the basis of these operations lie in the actual gathering of intelligence, and the targeting of operations based on this intelligence. For example, the purpose of the geolocation of cellular phone sim cards is not to allow the one being monitored to know that they are being watched, at which point counter-measures can be introduced. Rather the point is to actually gather location data and to use this location data within a structure of increasingly fluid, small force footprint counterterrorism operations, and this necessitates the actual gathering of intelligence to go undetected. In this sense, deterrence becomes a hindrance to the attempt to gather and weaponize information, generating a focus of countermeasures among targets, rather than maintaining clandestinity and operational secrecy. The primary emphasis here is on actual operations, the identification of targets, the locating of targets spatially and the direction of operations on a target, rather than to deter the target to begin with. As such, we cannot analyze the scope of state force capacity merely through the lens of information gathering, but have to analyze this on the basis of information becoming weaponized, or processed and made into the basis of actual material operations. When

we add in this plane of analysis, the analysis of actual weaponization, the picture of state force capacity changes dramatically.

Weaponization occurs on two levels, whether we are discussing the weaponization of pathogens or information; firstly the material has to be turned into a stable form, then it has to be able to be deployed materially⁵. To begin to understand this process of the weaponization of information we have to analyze two separate processes with different logistical requirements and limits, the gathering of information and the processing and weaponization of information, and then discuss this in relation to the actual logistical capacity of policing and military structures to carry out operations. It is on this level that the predominant structures of surveillance differ from deterrent based, descriptively panoptic, structures that are so often discussed at length, or that we see in some cities, in some areas and in some retail spaces. On the level of the weaponization and operational use of information we have to begin to develop an analysis of capacity, the capacity to gather information, the capacity to analyze and weaponize information and the capacity to utilize weaponized information operationally.

To begin this analysis we have to look at the first link in this chain that moves from the gathering of information to operational utilization, the movement from information gathering to information weaponization. It has become common to assume that the capacity to gather information somehow corresponds to the ability to process information, or that the ability to gather information is, in itself, important. It is not that large amounts of information cannot be gathered, it clearly can, but there is a distinct limitation on the level of processing, which requires the use of limited technological forms of narrowing down the signal spectrum and the information generated in its monitoring. These forms of narrowing down data, from the use of keywords to facial recognition, are necessarily

5 Lockwood, 2008

based on known variables, making it impossible to detect new forms of communication, careful choices of words or unknown threats. Without an understanding of the so-called threat spectrum in past moments the structures of filtering cannot be constructed in the present. For example, facial recognition operates based on the matching of facial features and the relation of features to one another among known faces, usually faces that come from police image databases. Long ago it was recognized that clandestine operations were easier to carry out if the operative was someone that was not known, someone that did not have any form of criminal record for example, and someone that was not known to be part of an organization; this, even in times where the technology of surveillance was less comprehensive and technologically advanced, has functioned as a common tactic, along with the use of infiltration, in covert operations.

The capacity to process information is then further limited due to the “human factor”, not just human error, but also the interpretive elements of information analysis and the limited capacity to process actual information. When we take a look at a computer system, and the structure of the limits of a computer system, we are still looking at a structure that is based in the limitations of the programmer themselves, and the ways that the architecture of the system is structured, a process that incorporates more contingency and choice than is commonly thought. The limits of the system then interact with the limited capacity of analysts themselves, the limits to the amount of information that can be processed within a period of time. This processing comes into a dynamic with the detail of analysis; to do thorough analysis of a subject and a network of connections, for example, takes more time and resources than to engage in a superficial analysis, even when spread out between numerous analysts. The amount of information gathered, therefore, is not the operative category that has to be analyzed, rather we have to focus the dynamic between the ability to gather

information and the operational capacity to process information, and the gathering of information becomes nothing but a stream of information that, of not captured through analysis, becomes irrelevant in itself.

On a level of gathering and processing intelligence distinct limitations are reached relatively quickly, more so as the carrying capacity of the system of intelligence gathering expands. As with operations, which we will discuss later, this is a question of capacity. To the degree that we expand the amount of information that we are gathering we have to expand the capacity to process information, as well as the capacity to keep the very gathering of information secret. This not only implies the training and funding of analysts, but also their hiring, screening and training, a process that is clearly not without error, the whistleblower is that margin of error. As James Bamford discusses in *Body of Secrets*⁶, even within the NSA this limit is reached and exceeded quickly. Within the NSA there may be 100,000 employees and contractors that are responsible for processing data on any number of levels, of which around 30,000-35,000, at best estimate, are involved in the actual analysis of bulk data that is collected. When this is compared with the amount of data that the NSA gathers⁷ the problem here should be clear: there is not nearly enough personnel, and could never be enough personnel, to actually process every piece of information. This necessitates the use of filtering protocols, specifically computerized filtering protocols, but these present a problem in themselves. When one filters information one is necessarily limiting the vision of the so-called threat spectrum, there is necessarily information not being analyzed, and potential information not being analyzed. Coupled with the limitations of actual analysis, the analysis of information by human analysts, the importance of looking into the limits of this link between information gathering and information processing becomes clear.

6 Bamford, 2002

7 According to a number of articles that resulted from the Snowden leaks the NSA gathers 2 million text messages and 5 billion records of cell phone location data a day, and that does not include monitored phone calls, emails, web surfing information or any other form of data that they gather.

FROM WEAPONIZATION TO OPERATIONS

From these distinct limitations we have to then begin to analyze the final process, the movement from processed intelligence to material operations. Here, again we reach another set of distinct numerical and operational limitations. For a full operational capacity to exist, for this assumption of the absolute omnipotence of the state to function, we would have to assume that the capacity of the state is limitless and despatialized. In other words, occupation of space is not a momentary phenomena, but an actually limitless operation, one that has no specific point of termination. As such, it is not only that occupation, the maintenance of the ability to operate in an area in such a dense concentration as to be able to limit the ability for counteractions to occur, requires an immense operational infrastructure in an immediate zone, but requires the supply of these zones of operation and so on. Then, for some form of absolute capacity to exist we would have to then argue that this capacity exists in a total way, across all space evenly and without movement. Without this absolute coverage, without literally operating in all spaces simultaneously, there are always gaps in coverage that can serve as the point of departure for insurgent actions. Clearly, the logistical capacity that this would take would be impossible to imagine, a logistical absurdity. This is why occupation forces tend to concentrate in areas, deploy from safe zones and concentrate force in areas of low intensity conflict, but this far from total occupation, and it is this dynamic that constructs the space that insurgencies exploit operationally. Given that the numerical and logistical limitations of this are clear, the question then becomes one of force capacity, movement through space and the ability to utilize information to carry out operations.

The limitations of the gathering of information and the processing of information into weaponized intelligence that operations can be based on

becomes relevant to the degree that operational capacity can compensate for the distinct limitations that are faced in the attempted operation of space or within the framework of security operations, both of which require a structure of occupation to more or less of a degree, in higher and lower concentrations. The concentration of occupation forces within space exists in a direct relationship to the amount of resistance that is presented within a terrain and the predictability of action within a zone of operations. As we have mentioned in other reports, insurgencies tend to function not on the level of holding space, but rather by amplifying contingency. To the degree insurgent forces become legible, and having to defend a space makes one very easily located, allows occupying forces to concentrate force at a specific location where they can contain areas and leverage their firepower advantage⁸. However, to the degree that insurgent forces can prevent being located, contained and eliminated a distinct limitation on the ability to gather intelligence begins to set in, as well as the need to concentrate occupation forces in the attempt to move through space. Though numerous technologies have come to amplify the amount of space that can be operated within and through, such as the use of cars, radios and firearms, at the end of the day, the amount of space that can be physically occupied at any one moment is incredibly limited, a space that becomes more limited when friction, resistance, is added into this movement, at which point police forces have to concentrate to move through space, covering less space.

There are two dynamics to keep in mind here. The first dynamic is the dynamic between the breadth of the terrain of conflict and the concentration of force in a space. As terrain spreads out, as more space has to be covered, the concentration of finite forces has to dissipate in

8 Russian General Staff, trans. Grau, Lester and Gress Michael, 2002; In their reportback from the Afghan War the Russian General Staff clearly documents the use of intelligence to locate insurgent forces, the development of the tactics of the isolation of areas of engagement and the movement through these areas to eliminate the ability of insurgents to operate in an area, but only temporarily.

order to cover space. This is a simple mathematical calculation, if we take the number of finite forces and divide this by the space that has to be covered we can come to some understanding of how quickly this dispersal of force occurs. Often, this is compensated for by protecting major lines of movement and communication as well as vital infrastructure; this limits the amount of space that is secured, but not the actual terrain of conflict. As we see in the example of American occupation forces in Iraq, roads and towns could be moved through and secured for periods of time, along with the vicinity immediately around firebases, but the space outside of these limited areas was not secured, and it is in these spaces that the insurgency structured its logistical bases, weapons stores and training facilities, if they had any in a local area. Insurgencies function by forcing a choice to be made; in the deployment of asymmetric tactics, in which the goal is not to hold space, but to expand the terrain of possible attack, occupying/policing forces have to choose between securing certain areas or covering more space, either leaving critical infrastructure open to attack or limiting the amount of space secured. This is then combined with the level of conflict mobilized within a certain area in the resistance to occupation force operations. When occupation/police forces find themselves under attack it is common to move into defensive postures, concentrating force to repel attack, and limiting the amount of space covered more.

Though it is clear that this process of gathering, weaponizing and operationalizing information operates as a process that has to be analyzed on a step by step level in order to understand the limitations that are presented, it is also important to get an understanding of how the different aspects of this process can come to reinforce other aspects, or degrade them. As has often been discussed, the limitation of information within a terrain of conflict negatively impacts the ability to operate within that terrain, while recognizing that total information is an impossibility. This

is not only due to the limits in processing, but also operational limitations as well. As terrain of conflict functions as a mobile kinetic dynamic of actions and effects that proceeds at such a pace, even in low intensity scenarios, that the ability to gather information is always outpaced by the actual flow of events. As such, surveillance tends to focus on three primary planes, human intelligence (humint), signals intelligence (sigint) and image intelligence (imint), and the various practices incorporated within these spheres of surveillance. Though sigint and imint tend to function at a distance, with the ability to capture images from miles in the sky and communications from almost anywhere on the planet, humint, on the other hand, has to always function within proximity of a target. This proximity is not necessarily spatial, and can function through a social proximity, the informant is a part of that process. But, in situations in which occupation forces have difficulty operating within a terrain for a consistent period of time the ability to gather humint becomes more difficult and the ability to understand sigint and imint becomes more interpretive and less based in information about on the ground situations. At the same time, in areas where occupation forces function smoothly, and can project across space, these forms of intelligence become easier to gather and understand. This dynamic is clear if we take a look at the fate of informants in parts of Afghanistan or even in areas of Northern Ireland where the IRA was highly concentrated in communities. As capacities increase or degrade in one area the process as a whole begins to degrade as well. The material limitations of force, combined with the limitations of information analysis, far from generating an omnipotent force that can police all time and all space, eliminating political possibility entirely, actually can be seen as a remarkably limited force spatially operating in reference to incredibly partial understandings of terrain based in limited capacities to analyze information.

Conclusion: On Unintentional Panopticism

The combinations of the limitations that we have been speaking about above, along with the tendency of this process to become more or less comprehensive as certain elements increase or decrease their operational capacity should point to the obvious conclusion; the assumption of state omnipotence is one borne of strategic miscalculation, lack of access to specific strategic information and a tendency to allow rhetorical excess overcome operational analysis. Even though the intention of surveillance and intelligence gathering logistics within the United States, for the most part, functions through a non-panoptic lens based in actual information gathering and the weaponization of information gathered covertly, the misunderstandings of the material limitations of intelligence and operational capacity has generated a panoptic effect. In other words, even though surveillance, for the most part, is actually structured to gather actual intelligence and use this intelligence operationally, the awareness of these programs, specifically a non-specific and highly conceptual understanding of these programs combined with a general lack of material analysis of tactical capacity, has generated a deterrent effect that is not necessarily the intention of the logistical formations engaged in intelligence gathering.

We can see this with the Snowden leaks, and their aftermath; in response to a seemingly all-seeing NSA many people have begun to drop Gmail accounts or curtail online activities, at best, and have begun to feed the mentality of a total lack of political possibilities, at worst. The leaks themselves, rather than being approached as information about a limited structure that countermeasures can be developed in relation to, have begun to foster a deterrent effect that is unparalleled, and unintended. To the degree that deterrent effects are intentional surveillance infrastructure, or the image of surveillance infrastructure,

becomes visible and openly publicized. This is fundamentally different than what is seen in relation to the NSA and other centers of actual intelligence gathering. For intelligence gathering to function the ability to maintain surveillance becomes imperative, and this surveillance has to function in such a way that the behavior of an intelligence target is modified as little as possible. This form of actual information gathering, weaponization and operationalization functions within an assumption of invisibility, making a focus on a deterrent effect impossible. In exposure the behavior of the target can be modified to counter surveillance, which modifies the intelligence dynamic from one that is structured to gather information to one that becomes deterrent in itself, becomes panoptic in itself. This has become the unfortunate response to the Snowden leaks, among others, on a mass scale. Rather than taking the Snowden leaks as a partial glimpse into the capabilities and limitations of NSA processing methods, limitations and capabilities, material phenomena that can be responded to, the general sense of the scale of surveillance has been separated from other, more specific, information, and fit into a narrative of state omnipotence which has generated a deterrent effect.

This is not to say that the leaks are qualitatively bad or something like this, rather, we have to acknowledge the complicated effects of these leaks in relation to a material dynamic based in a limited capacity of force mobilization. On the one hand, it is clear that the Snowden leaks have had a deterrent effect that is so profound that it essentially has changed the very function of intelligence gathering. Intelligence gathering only achieves a deterrent effect to the degree that methods and scopes are exposed, but this exposure fundamentally prevents intelligence gathering from functioning; at the point of exposure countermeasures can be developed. After the leaks of sensitive intelligence information, and only a fragment of the documents Snowden copied have been released, the very prospect of intelligence gathering ceases to be secret,

and comes into the open. As such, the effect has been to generate a certain sense of the panoptic, a sense of the possibility of being watched; intelligence gathering cannot go on as it did before, in secret, and the use of countermeasures has increased, but at the same time the deterrent effect has become the most profound effect of surveillance itself. In this the very function of an organization of the NSA has changed from signals intelligence organization to symbol of panoptic functionality, the symbol that deterrence concentrates around. This is not to say that they do not still collect intelligence, the building of server farms around the US makes it clear that this is expanding in anything, but their primary security role has become the mass deterrent effect that the exposure of the scale of signals intelligence gathering has had.

But, what we can see from this process is something incredibly important, the function of panoptic structures are not a product of their structure, the actual functionality of surveillance or even the clear visibility of surveillance. Rather, panoptic structures exist through the perception of the deterred, the perception of those that are the supposed, possible, targets of surveillance, rather than the functionality or intention of surveillance itself. It is in this sense that the very mythology of state omnipotence has come to serve the function of the Panopticon, and this is the irony of what has been occurring. It is not that panoptic deterrence is even the goal, or at least was not the goal of the structuring of surveillance techniques in 21st Century America, but it is the over-reaction to the exposure of a portion of the surveillance that is already occurring that has generated a panoptic effect in itself. In order to push past this problem we have to come to understand the information leaks around surveillance and the material context that they exist in on a localized, immediate and material level.

Rather than taking the Snowden leaks as indication of state omnipotence we have to structure a new framework of analysis that reads

the capacity to gather information in relation to the limited ability to process information, and the processing of information in relation to an even more limited capacity to generate material operations from processed intelligence. In other words, just as intelligence gathering means nothing outside of the limited capacity to process and weaponize information in the form of material police operations, we cannot understand information about the NSA, or surveillance and policing in general, on a purely informational level, disconnected from material dynamics, conflicts and limitations. Far from the omnipotent structure that is seen in the partial analyses that have proliferated through the progressive media and radical discourse we are actually getting a glimpse into a fundamentally limited structure that, far from functioning as a spatio-temporal totality, actually functions in incredibly partial ways. It is in these gaps in material coverage that possibilities proliferate, and these gaps in coverage, even in the face of total information gathering, exist everywhere. The task, to the degree that panoptic structures function as a result of the perception of surveillance by those possibly under surveillance, is to shift the plane of analysis, away from exaggerated rhetorical statements of police capacity, and into a sober, clear, intelligence driven analysis of actual police operations and actual operational capacity. It is only at this point that we can take the recognition of gaps in coverage to the next step, the actual identification of where these gaps exist, and how they can be exploited. It is only at this point that the self-imposed deterrent effect of surveillance can give way to an actual material and immediate analysis of where the possibilities of action and resistance exist.

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